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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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K'taka monsoon session to start from 11 August

BENGALURU, 18 JULY

The monsoon session of the Karnataka legislature will be held from 11 August to 22 at the Vidhana Soudha here.

Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has summoned the Karnataka Legislative Assembly and Council to meet in Bengaluru at 11am on 11 August.

The Opposition may seek to corner the government on a host of issues, including its handling of the RCB victory celebrations that led to loss of lives due to stampede, the government taking up a new caste census and alleged communal killings in coastal districts, among others.

Several key Bills, including the Karnataka Crowd Control (Managing Crowd at Events and Venues of Mass Gathering) Bill, 2025; Karnataka Rohith Vemula Bill, 2025; Karnataka misinformation, fake news prohibition Bill, 2025; Karnataka hate speech and hate crimes prevention Bill, 2025, will be tabled during the session.

The session comes amid rumblings within both Congress and BJP over their leadership. While there are rumours about the Chief Minister change in the Congress, the BJP is faced with a factional rift over the continuation of BY Vijayendra as the State President. *—PTI*

US designates Pahalgam attackers a terror group

India lauds the 'timely' move against The Resistance Front

WASHINGTON/NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

The US has designated The Resistance Front (TRF), an proxy of the Pakistan-based terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba, as a "foreign terrorist organisation" over its alleged involvement in the Pahalgam terror attack, a move welcomed by India as a "timely and important".

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, announcing the punitive measure, said it was part of Washington's commitment to countering terrorism and enforcing President Donald Trump's call for justice.

Rubio said the US State Department is adding the TRF as a designated Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) and Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).

The TRF, a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) "front and proxy", claimed responsibility for the Pahalgam attack which killed 26 civilians, he said , adding it was "the deadliest attack on civilians in India since the 2008 Mumbai attack conducted by the LeT."

"TRF has also claimed responsibility for several attacks against Indian security forces, including most recently in 2024," Rubio said.

India welcomed the decision by the US with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar describing it as a "strong affirmation" of India-US counter-terror cooperation.

India said the that it has consistently emphasised the need for global cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

The TRF had claimed responsibility for the Pahalgam attack, but later said it was "hacked".

However, India's National Investigation Agency has identified TRF head Sheikh Sajjad Gul as the mastermind of the attack. *—PTI*

Security after the 22 April Pahalgam terror attack, which claimed 26 lives in Jammu and Kashmir ***PHOTO: ANI***

- The TRF had claimed responsibility for the Pahalgam attack, but later said it was "hacked". However, the National Investigation Agency has identified TRF head Sheikh Sajjad Gul as the mastermind of the attack

We must have at least two full days of debate and discussion (in upcoming Parliament) on the Pahalgam terror attack. The terrorists have still not been brought to justice.... Operation Sindoor, the role of China in Pakistan Air Force operation, the 23 times same claims being made in 66 days that President Trump stopped (the war) .... must be discussed

—Jairam Ramesh, Congress General Secretary

All parties ready for Varma's removal: Rijiju

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said on Friday that all political parties are on board on the issue of the impeachment of Justice Yashwant Varma, from whose residence burnt wads of currency notes were found.

"I have spoken to all the senior leaders of different political parties. I will also get in touch with some of the single-MP parties because I do not want to leave out any member. So it becomes a unified stand of the Parliament of India," Rijiju said.

"Corruption in the judiciary is an extremely sensitive and serious matter, because the judiciary is where people get justice," he added.

Rijiju said he is happy that the principal Opposition party, Congress, has understood the severity of the matter and agreed to be on board on the issue.

On former law minister Kapil Sibal saying that the movement would set a bad precedent and comparison to other cases, Rijiju said, "He (Sibal) does not realise that many MPs have gone far beyond him in terms of understanding, intellectuality, in terms of knowledge. The far (senior) citizen, he is a very average lawyer, but he has been put into such a thing... that he is the person who will shed light on everything. He can't guide the Parliament of India."

A fire incident at Justice Varma's Delhi residence in March, when he was a judge of the Delhi High Court, had led to the discovery of sacks of half-burnt cash. *—PTI*

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Justice Verma ***PHOTO: X***

Corruption in the judiciary is an extremely serious matter.... I have spoken to all the senior leaders of political parties.... So it becomes a unified stand of the Parliament

-Kiren Rijiju, Parliamentary Affairs Minister

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by West Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari and others in Durgapur on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

In WB, Modi says TMC promotes 'infiltration'

DURGAPUR, 18 JULY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a scathing attack on the Trinamool Congress (TMC) during a rally in Durgapur, accusing the party of jeopardising West Bengal's identity and national security for vote-bank politics. He claimed the BJP is the only party dedicated to protecting Bengali 'ashmita' (identity).

"The TMC is actively helping infiltrators. I want to say this very clearly that those who are not citizens of India and have entered illegally, the law will take its own course in accordance with the Constitution," he remarked, highlighting a "complete ecosystem" supporting illegal immigrants.

Amid ongoing tensions surrounding Bengali-speaking migrant workers, Modi asserted that "the real threat to Bengal's dignity... comes not from outside but from within." .

He added, "For years, (TMC, Left, and Congress) never considered recognising Bangla, whereas it was the BJP that granted it classical language status."

Modi promised a prosperous future for West Bengal and accused the TMC of deterring investment through "Gunda Tax" and corruption. Modi, also launched projects worth Rs 5,400 crore in the state, across the oil and gas, power, rail, and road sectors *—PTI*

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- Modi, launching projects worth Rs 5,400 crore in the state, said that the ruling TMC had created a complete ecosystem supporting illegal immigrants

Students forced to clean Yadgir school toilets

YADGIR, 18 JULY

Videos of girl children allegedly made to clean toilets in a residential school in Yadgir district has triggered outrage among parents and officials.

A total of 97 girl students from grades 8 to 10 are enrolled in Kasturba Gandhi Residential Govt School in Arakera (K) village.

In the video, some students can be heard saying that the girls are assigned to clean the toilets on a rotation basis.

"Due to the unavailability of anyone else to clean the toilets, it might have happened that the students cleaned them once. However, the person who recorded the video is a man. Who gave him permission to enter the premises?" asked Nivedita, the school Headmistress. She stated that a complaint regarding the incident will be filed with higher authorities.

Deputy Director of Public Instruction Officer (DDPI) Channabasava Mudhol, told SALAR NEWS, that a team of officials was sent to the school to investigate the incident.

"We will take strict action against those found responsible," Mudhol said, indicating action against both school authorities and those videotaping the incident.

Shashidhar Kosambe, Member of the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Told SALAR NEWS, "I have directed Deputy Director of Public Instruction, Department (DDPI) Yadgir to take appropriate action against the Headmistress." A detailed report will be filed to the Commission, Kosambe added. *—Salar News*

Video screen-grabs show students cleaning the Kasturba Gandhi Residential Govt School toilets ***PHOTO: SALAR***

After CM's rap, Meta fixes Kannada translation issues

NEW DELHI/ BENGALURU, 18 JULY

Social media giant Meta on Thursday apologised for inaccurate Kannada translation and claimed to have fixed the issue, after State Chief Minister Siddaramaiah raised concerns over faulty auto-translation of Kannada content on its platforms.

"We fixed an issue that briefly caused this inaccurate Kannada translation," a Meta spokesperson said.

Raising concerns over the, Siddaramaiah said that it was leading to the distortion of facts and misleading users. "Such negligence by tech giants can harm public understanding and trust," he added. Meta's AI machine translation model provided a machine translation error which caused inaccurate Kannada translations in Facebook-- which the company claims to have been fixed now.*—PTI*

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Man held for abusive remarks against Kannada community

BENGALURU, 18 JULY

A man has been arrested for allegedly making derogatory comments towards Kannada. The incident took place on 17 July when Ranjith Mathew, a delivery partner, called customer Mithun Sarkar to confirm an address for a T-shirt order. Sarkar, originally from Tripura and residing in City for nine years, reportedly spoke in Hindi and verbally abused Mathew. The accused, who claimed to be under the influence of alcohol, was booked sections promoting enmity and intentional insult of the BNS. *—PTI*

ED arrests ex-Ch'garh CM's son in liquor scam case, sentences him to 5 days

RAIPUR, 18 JULY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday arrested Chaitanya Baghel, son of Congress leader and former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, in an alleged liquor scam-linked money laundering case, official sources said.

He was taken into custody under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) following fresh raids conducted at his residence in Bhilai town of Durg district. The father-son duo resides at the same place.

A heavy posse of police personnel was seen outside the house, even as some party supporters gathered.

The senior Baghel said it is Chaitanya's birthday on Friday.

A special PMLA court sent Chaitanya to ED custody for five days, the sources said.

The sources said Chaitnaya was arrested under Section 19 of the anti-money laundering law as he was allegedly not cooperating during the searches that came about following receipt of fresh evidence in the case.

The sources said companies allegedly linked to Chaitanya were the "recipient" of about Rs 17 crore "proceeds of crime" that were generated from the alleged liquor scam. Funds worth about Rs 1,070 crore are under the scanner of the agency vis-a-vis the role of junior Baghel, the sources said.

The ED has claimed that the "scam" resulted in a "massive loss" to the state exchequer and filled the pockets of the beneficiaries of a liquor syndicate with over Rs 2,100 crore. *—PTI*

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Woman killed as BMTC bus hits roadside canteen

BENGALURU, 18 JULY

A woan died and four others were injured when an electric bus operated by the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) allegedly rammed into a roadside canteen in Peenya Industrial Area on Friday morning, police said.

According to the BMTC, the accident occurred at around 8.45am when the bus was operating from Majestic to Peenya. The driver allegedly lost control of the bus. The woman, who was standing near the canteen, sustained severe injuries in the accident and, despite receiving treatment at Lakshmi Hospital, succumbed to her injuries. "The safety of passengers and the public is the first priority of the organisation and the investigation into the case is underway," the BMTC said in its statement.*—PTI*

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ONE ACCUSED SUSPECTED

50 City schools receive hoax bomb threats

BENGALURU, 18 JULY

Nearly 50 schools in City received hoax bomb threats on Friday morning, police said.

A single, identical email with the subject 'Bombs inside the school' was sent to nearly 50 email IDs of various schools at 7.24am from the user, roadkill333@atomicmail.io, they said.

"Hello. I am writing to let you know that I have placed several explosive devices (Trinitrotoluene) within school classrooms. The explosives are skilfully hidden, in black plastic bags," it stated.

School authorities immediately alerted police, who reached the institutions with the bomb disposal squads and anti-sabotage check teams. Students and staff were immediately evacuated from the premises.

"At least four schools in the Central division (Bengaluru police) limits received a bomb threat email this morning, . All necessary measures were taken as per protocol. Nothing suspicious was found, and it turned out to be a hoax email," a police officer said.

Besides, Central division, schools located in other police divisions of the City Police are also said to have received bomb threat emails, which later turned out to be a hoax, but the exact number was not immediately confirmed.

In response, State Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said, "We are bringing a law against fake news, giving false information, instigation, among others."

Home Minister G Parameshwara said the government was treating the issue with utmost seriousness. *—PTI*

45 Delhi schools get bomb threat

More than 45 schools across Delhi received bomb threats on Friday, triggering panic among the students and their parents. Delhi Police and other quick-response authorities have launched search and evacuation operations, an official said. This is the fourth such day this week when schools in the capital received bomb threats. *—PTI*

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Students leave the St. Germain Academy, near Coles Park, after bomb threats to various City schools, on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

PHOTO: PTI

Cong has lost its mental balance, says Karandalaje

MYSURU, 18 JULY

Union Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Shobha Karandlaje on Friday attacked Congress leaders for suggesting that a Dalit be made the State BJP unit's Chief. The minister said in a tweet that Congress leaders having lost their mental balance, issue such statements to divert the attention of the people as they failed to fulfil its promises to the people. Several Congress MLAs opposed against the state government for not providing funds for development activities. Centrally sponsored schemes are not being implemented effectively in State due to corruption, she said. The minister also claimed that the government has no clarity about its expenditure and mobilization of resources. ***—Salar News***

Belagavi to receive 300 new buses: Transport minister

BELAGAVI, 18 JULY

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy has announced the allocation of 300 new buses for Belagavi in the State including 100 electric buses, to enhance public transport services. The announcement came during the inauguration of the new Regional Road Transport and Joint Commissioner offices in Belagavi, attended by Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi. The electric buses will be distributed across all districts in the State, while the city's new bus stand, developed under the Smart City initiative, is set to open soon. Minister Reddy emphasised the need for stricter regulations within the Transport Department to improve efficiency and curb malpractices. Jarkiholi called for more transportation infrastructure, including additional bus stops, to meet the district's needs. ***—Salar News***

Chikkaballapura man falls victim to cyber fraud

CHIKKABALLAPURA, 18 JULY

A retired senior geologist from Sabbenahalli village of Chikkaballapur of the State, BK Ramachandrappa, has fallen victim to a sophisticated fraud scheme, losing over Rs 12 lakh . The elderly couple reportedly received a call from someone impersonating a Mumbai police officer, claiming their bank account had been implicated in money laundering and demanding an immediate transfer of funds to avoid arrest. Under duress and fearing for their safety, Mr. Ramachandrappa and his wife pledged their gold and transferred the money to the fraudster. Upon realising they had been deceived the following day, they reported the incident to Chikkaballapur's CEN police. Investigations have revealed that the suspect's phone number originated from abroad, prompting law enforcement to pursue the case further. ***—Salar News***

Heavy rain leads to school closures in Kodagu and Udupi

KODAGU, 18 JULY

Venkata Raju, the Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate of Kodagu, has announced the closure of schools and colleges in the district due to persistent heavy rainfall. Rainfall has been observed across various regions, including Madikeri, Virajpet, and Somwarpet. Similarly, Udupi Deputy Commissioner has ordered the closure of schools and Anganwadis in areas impacted by the severe weather. Udupi, along with other parts of coastal Karnataka, including Dakshina Kannada and Uttara Kannada, continues to experience heavy rainfall. The IMD has also issued yellow alerts for Telangana.***—ANI***

Let cops seek an SIT to probe Dharmasthala row, says CM

Siddaramaiah to discuss stampede in next Cabinet meeting

MYSURU, 18 JULY

The government will decide about setting up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe into the mass burials at Dharmasthala based on police recommendations, not individual pressure, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said.

"We cannot establish SIT merely based on someone's statement" he told reporters in Mysuru on Friday. "A person who was absconding for more than ten years has voluntarily come forward with claims about buried bodies in Dharmasthala. The police are conducting an investigation, and we shall await their report before determining further action. We are not under any pressure regarding this case, and even if there were pressure, we would not yield to it."

Referring to retired justice V Gopalagowda demand for a SIT, he said that his government is not pro or against the constitution of SIT. However, he said the government cannot act on the suggestions of individuals, but must wait for the report.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said his government was not under any pressure regarding a probe into allegations of the mass burials at Dharmasthala ***PHOTO: PTI***

Reacting to State BJP chief BY Vijayendra challenging Congress leaders to make AICC President Mallikarjuna Kharge the Prime Ministerial face, Siddaramaiah hit back, asking Vijayendra to give up his post.

"Let BJP make a Dalit as its State unit Chief," he said. "Congress is the only party abiding by the Constitution, committed for social justice. People of all communities are accorded positions in Congress."

On the RCB stampede outside M Chinnaswammy stadium in City, he said the Cabinet will discuss the Justice Michael D'Cunha report in its next meeting.

Asked about the findings of the report, he said, "the media has reported certain things....I will speak about it after the next cabinet meeting."

Replying to a question on opposition BJP's criticism of his government's mega "Sadhana Samavesha" convention in Mysuru, planned on Saturday, Siddaramaiah said, development works worth Rs 2,658 crore will be inaugurated and foundation stones will be laid during the event. He asked what BJP had done for the district.

—Salar News

AUTO-TRANSLATION GLITCH

Meta apologises, says fixed Kannada translation issue

NEW DELHI/ BENGALURU, 17 JULY

Social media giant Meta on Thursday apologised for inaccurate Kannada translation and claimed to have fixed the issue, after State Chief Minister Siddaramaiah raised concerns over faulty auto-translation of Kannada content on its platforms.

Raising concerns over the faulty auto-translation of Kannada content on Meta platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, Siddaramaiah said that it was leading to the distortion of facts and misleading users. "We fixed an issue that briefly caused this inaccurate Kannada translation. We apologise that this happened," a Meta spokesperson said.

Siddaramaiah said social media platforms must act responsibly, especially when dealing with official communication, and cautioned citizens to be aware that translations displayed on these platforms are often inaccurate.

"Faulty auto-translation of Kannada content on Meta platforms is distorting facts and misleading users. This is especially dangerous when it comes to official communication. My media advisor has formally written to Meta urging immediate correction," Siddaramaiah had posted on X.

"I caution citizens to be aware that translations shown are often inaccurate. Such negligence by tech giants can harm public understanding and trust," he added.

In the case of Kannada auto-translation, Meta's AI machine translation model provided a machine translation error which caused inaccurate Kannada translations in Facebook. *—PTI*

BJP slams Cong over viral video of dog attacking child

A videograb of a girl being attacked a stray dog ***PHOTO: ANI***

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

State's BJP unit on Friday hit out at the Congress party after CCTV cameras showed a video footage of a young girl being attacked and dragged by a group of stray dogs.

In a post on X, the party stated that the Congress party had been looting State "day in and day out without a shred of shame", further stating that the party had done nothing for development.

"You failed to protect our daughters and sons because your appeasement politics matters more than public safety. You failed to stop cow slaughter. You failed to prevent maternal deaths. Now don't fail little kids too. A young girl was just attacked and dragged by stray dogs, caught on CCTV," the post claimed.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka alleged that the government was funding disproportionality. He said that the government was allocating Rs 50 crore to Congress MLAs' constituencies and Rs 25 crore to BJP-JDS constituencies.

He alleged that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's Mysuru Sadhana Sammelana was an attempt to distract the public from the RCB stampede.

Meanwhile, former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai said that development of Dalits and backward communities cannot happen merely through mere announcements and alleged that the CM seemed to believe that mere announcements can fill people's stomachs.

—Salar News with Agencies

STIR FOR BASIC RIGHTS

Members of the Karnataka Dalita Sangharsha Samithi hold a protest, demanding land and housing rights for Dalits, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Prateek Chavan, son of Aurad BJP MLA Prabhu Chavan, is accused of sexual harassment under the false promise of marriage ***PHOTO: SALAR***

AURAD BJP MLA PRABHU CHAVAN'S SON ACCUSED OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

BIDAR, 18 JULY

A young woman has filed a complaint with the State Commission for Women against Prateek Chavan, son of former minister and Aurad BJP MLA, Prabhu Chavan, alleging sexual harassment under the false promise of marriage.

The woman had attempted to file an FIR at the Hokrana Police Station in Aurad, but the police refused to register the case.

She alleged that Prateek had established sexual relations with her on the pretext of marrying her. Both their families had agreed to the marriage and they were formally engaged in December, 2023.

Following the engagement, Prateek took her on various trips, during which he allegedly insisted on being physically intimate with her. However, he evaded the marriage, instead questioning her on her virginity.

When the woman's parents visited Prateek's house to confront him, they were allegedly insulted for being "poor."

Prateek's family used their influence to avoid legal action, she alleged. *—Salar News*

Unani conclave highlights health needs

HYDERABAD/ BENGALURU, 18 JULY

A one-day Unani Conclave on "Unani Innovations in Combatting Non-Communicable Diseases" was held at the National Research Institute of Unani Medicine for Skin Disorders (NRIUMSD), Hyderabad. The event was jointly organised by Hamdard Laboratories India and CCRUM, under the Ministry of Ayush.

Mr Mohammed Zubair of Hamdard Laboratories welcomed participants and highlighted the company's commitment to scientific development and promotion of the Unani system.

Dr Srikanth Babu, Director, Ayush Department, Telangana, stressed the importance of traditional systems in addressing lifestyle diseases. "Ayush is showing results through natural, holistic care," he noted. Dr Vasant Rao praised Hamdard's efforts in making Unani medicine accessible and in providing key resources to practitioners.

NRIUMSD Director Dr Younus Munshi said lifestyle-related diseases require long-term Unani solutions rooted in education and research. He noted the institute's focus on vitiligo and its partnerships with major research bodies. Valedictory Chief Guest Shahnawaz Qasim, IPS, called for ethics and compassion in Unani practice. The conclave also featured technical sessions, student awards, and participation from scholars across South India. *—Salar News*

Participants at a meet on Unani innovations held at the National Research Institute of Unani Medicine for Skin Disorders in Hyderabad on Friday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Woman killed as BMTC bus hits roadside canteen

BENGALURU, 18 JULY

A woman died and four others were injured when an electric bus operated by the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) allegedly rammed into a roadside canteen in Peenya Industrial Area on Friday morning, police said.

According to the BMTC, the accident occurred at around 8.45am when the bus was operating from Majestic to Peenya. The driver allegedly lost control of the bus. The woman, who was standing near the canteen, sustained severe injuries in the accident and, despite receiving treatment at Lakshmi Hospital, succumbed to her injuries.

Among the four others who were also injured, two were being treated at Maruthi Hospital, while the others were at Shiva Venkateshwara Hospital, BMTC officials said.

A report on the incident has been filed with the Peenya Traffic Police Station and an investigation is underway, police said. *—PTI*

CENTRE VS X

Fake 'Supreme Court of K'taka' a/c verified by X: Govt

BENGALURU, 18 JULY

Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta on Friday highlighted the dangers of unchecked online activity by revealing to the Karnataka High Court that a fake, yet "verified", X (formerly Twitter) account was successfully created in the name of the "Supreme Court of Karnataka."

Appearing for the Centre in its ongoing face-off with social media giant X Corp, Mehta presented the account as evidence of how easily digital platforms can be misused to mislead the public.

"We created this account. It is verified. I can now post anything, and lakhs would believe that the Supreme Court of Karnataka has said it," Mehta argued, underscoring the anonymity and lack of accountability that currently exists online.

The dramatic reveal came during a hearing on X Corp's petition challenging takedown orders issued by government officials under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act ***PHOTO: PTI***

The dramatic reveal came during a hearing on X Corp's petition challenging takedown orders issued by government officials under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act. X Corp contends that only the procedure under Section 69A of the Act, read with the IT Rules, allows for content blocking orders.

Mehta reiterated the Centre's longstanding concern that internet users act as their own publisher, printer and broadcaster, making regulatory oversight complex but necessary.

Justice M Nagaprasanna acknowledged the concern of X Corp's advocate KG Raghavan that such material cannot be introduced across the bar without being formally placed on record, but clarified that the example was presented only illustratively and would not affect the merits of X's case.

"Their point is that creation of such fake accounts is far too easy," he observed. *—PTI*

Kolar MLA Nanje Gowda to challenge ED's asset freeze

KOLAR, 18 JULY

KY Nanje Gowda, Congress legislator from Malur in Kolar district and Chairman of the Kolar Chikkaballapura Districts Co-operative Milk Producers Union Limited (KOMUL), has announced his intention to challenge the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) confiscation of Rs 1.32 crore worth of his assets in a money laundering case. Nanje Gowda contends that the land seized by the ED, which he and his brother purchased in April 2021, was acquired legitimately.

KY Nanje Gowda ***PHOTO: PTI***

He has vehemently denied allegations of irregularities during the KOMUL recruitment process in December 2022, asserting that it was conducted transparently and without malpractice. Nanje Gowda pledged to resign from politics if proven guilty of any corrupt practices, emphasising his commitment to transparency in all financial disclosures during the assembly polls.

The ED, however, claims that significant evidence of wrongdoing was uncovered during raids on Nanje Gowda's residence, including incriminating documents and over Rs 1.50 crore in bribes linked to the recruitment. The agency's statement highlights irregularities in OMR sheet manipulation and implicates Nanje Gowda in directing these actions, with at least Rs 80 lakh of the alleged corrupt money attributed to him. *—Salar News*

Modi sounds poll bugle in Bihar, attacks Opposition

Return of NDA alliance can protect Bihar from 'evil intentions' of Congress

PATNA, 18 JULY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched a sharp political offensive in Bihar, calling for the return of an NDA government to protect the state from the "evil intentions" of the RJD-Congress alliance.

He was addressing a massive rally in Motihari, in the PM's 53rd visit to the state since 2014, after launching a slew of development projects worth over Rs 7,200 crore.

Sounding the poll bugle ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections, Modi asserted that a "Viksit Bihar" is essential for the development of eastern India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the RJD of exploiting the poor by taking land in exchange for false promises of government jobs, in an apparent reference to the alleged 'land-for-jobs' scam **PHOTO: PTI**

Attacks RJD, Congress

Modi accused the RJD of exploiting the poor by taking land in exchange for false promises of government jobs, in an apparent reference to alleged 'land-for-jobs' scam.

Bihar people broke the RJD's shackles, "but the younger generation must be made aware of the despair in which Bihar was mired two decades ago," Modi told the crowd.

He claimed that under RJD-Congress rule, the poor couldn't even dream of pucca houses. In contrast, he said, under Modi Awas Yojana, over 50 lakh houses have been built in Bihar alone.

Modi also alleged that the Congress-led UPA government engaged in "political retaliation" against the Nitish Kumar-led Bihar administration, extending only Rs 2 lakh crore in assistance over a decade.

CM's thanks to PM

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, sharing the stage with the PM, praised and thanked Modi for his frequent visits and support for Bihar. Without directly naming the opposition, CM Kumar said, "Governance began in earnest in Bihar only after we took over".

In line with his vision of a future-ready railway network, Modi flagged off four new Amrit Bharat trains and released over Rs 160 crore to 40,000 beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin. *— Agencies*

No relief for Lalu from SC in land-for-job scam

PHOTO: ANI

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to stay the trial court proceedings against former Bihar chief minister and RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav in the CBI's land-for-jobs case. A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh asked the Delhi High Court to expedite hearing on his plea for quashing of the CBI FIR. The top court also granted exemption from appearance to Yadav before trial court in the case noting his health condition. "The appeal being against interim order we are not inclined to interfere except by observing that at the time of disposing the final matter the observation made in the impugned order will not stand in the way," the bench said. *—PTI*

Ritesh Pandey, ex-IPS officer joins JSP

PATNA, 18 JULY

Bhojpuri singer Ritesh Pandey and former IPS officer Jaiprakash Singh on Friday joined the Jan Suraaj Party (JPS) in presence of Prashant Kishor. Welcoming them into the party, Kishor said, "We deliberately chose a day when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is visiting Bihar & will try to ensnare the people with his big talk". *—PTI*

Vadra 'hounded' by govt for 10 years: Rahul

KOTTAYAM, 18 JULY

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, on Friday, paid glowing tribute to the late Oommen Chandy during a memorial meeting marking the former Kerala Chief Minister's second death anniversary.

Describing Chandy as not merely an individual but "an expression of Kerala politics," Gandhi praised his lifelong dedication to public service, even amid one of the most brutal political smear campaigns.

Referring to the multi-crore solar scam, he said Chandy was subjected to "criminal" political attacks and "non-stop lies," yet remained calm, humble, & deeply committed to the people. CBI eventually cleared all allegations.

During the event at Puthuppally, he criticised both RSS and CPI(M), accusing them of lacking emotional connection with the public.

Separately, Gandhi condemned the Enforcement Directorate's chargesheet against his brother-in-law Robert Vadra as a continuation of a decade-long political witch-hunt. *—PTI*

NCP (SP) & BJP MLAs arrested after violence

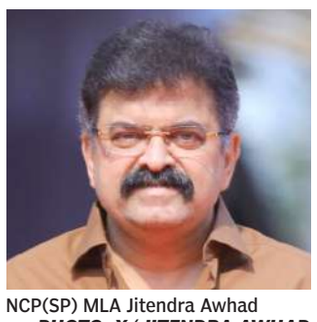
MUMBAI, 18 JULY

Police have arrested one supporter each of NCP(SP) MLA Jitendra Awhad and BJP's Gopichand Padalkar in connection with their clash on the premises of the Maharashtra legislature complex here, an official said on Friday.

Supporters of Awhad and Padalkar had an altercation inside the Vidhan Bhavan on Thursday, a day after the two legislators themselves had a heated exchange.

The police have arrested Nitin Deshmukh, a supporter of Awhad, and Padalkar's supporter, Rishikesh Takle, and recorded their statement, the official said.

NCP(SP) MLC's sit-in-protest NCP(SP) MLC Amol Mitkari also staged a sit-in protest at the entrance of the Maharashtra Vidhan Bhavan after his aide was denied entry into the complex on the last day of the monsoon session of the state legislature.



NCP(SP) MLA Jitendra Awhad **PHOTO: X/ JITENDRA AWHAD**

Calling the incident "shameful", the legislator belonging to the Ajit Pawar-led party alleged discrimination, and said while those facing serious charges were allowed entry into the legislature complex earlier, his PA was stopped despite him carrying official documents.

The police also booked NCP(SP) MLA Jitendra Awhad and a few others for obstructing public servants in discharging their duty while staging a protest at the Vidhan Bhavan, an official said.

After the protests at the Vidhan Bhavan, Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar on Friday said visitors will not be allowed in the legislature complex during the current session.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut also criticised the BJP over the clash at Vidhan Bhavan, alleging that people with serious criminal records were being inducted into the party. *—PTI*

MOTHER SHIP SUPPORT VESSELS

Union Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth, Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi and others during the commissioning ceremony of the Indian Navy Ship (INS) Nistar, the first indigenously designed and constructed Diving Support Vessel, in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh on Friday **PHOTO: X**

Ex-Congress MP held in co-op bank scam

PORT BLAIR, 18 JULY

In a major development, the CID on Friday arrested former Congress MP Kuldeep Rai Sharma in connection with the Andaman and Nicobar State Cooperative Bank Ltd (ANSCBL) loan irregularities case, police said. Sharma, who formerly served as the chairman of ANSCBL, was arrested from a private hospital in Port Blair where he was admitted due to health issues. "Sharma was admitted to Dr Ritika's Diagnostic Solutions Multi-Speciality Hospital with some health issues. In the morning, a team of officers led by senior officers went to the private hospital and arrested him," a senior police officer said. Apart from Sharma, others named in the FIR include the cooperative bank's former chairman, board members and directors/officials of the bank and several beneficiaries. *—PTI*

Centre isn't judge of water issues: Minister

HYDERABAD, 18 JULY

Union Coal Minister G Kishan Reddy on Friday said that the Centre is acting as a "facilitator," not as a "judge" with regard to interstate water issues between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

The Union government had invited Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Chief Ministers, N Chandrababu Naidu and A Revanth Reddy, respectively, for discussion on the proposed Polavaram Banakacherla Link Project (PBLP) in Andhra, he said at a press conference here.

"When disputes arise between two states regarding river water issues, the central government invites the CMs of both states for discussions. We respect cooperative federalism...This is not to deliver a judgment...but to act as a facilitator in resolving the issue," Reddy said.

The Centre decided on 16 July to constitute a high-level technical committee to examine concerns around the PBLP and other pending water issues between Telugu states.

The PBLP is a major inter-basin river-linking initiative proposed by the Andhra government that aims to alleviate water scarcity in drought-prone regions. BRS working president KT Rama Rao had earlier alleged that Revanth Reddy tacitly agreed to the Banakacharla project, which the Telangana-based party would oppose tooth and nail.

Kishan Reddy also hit out at the KCR-led party for changing its stance. *—PTI*

G Kishan Reddy **PHOTO: ANI**

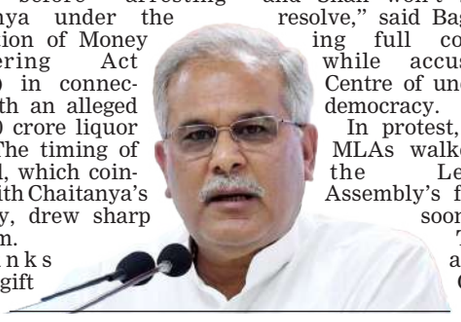
- The Centre decided on 16 July to constitute a high-level technical committee to examine concerns around the PBLP and other pending water issues between Telugu states.

'Centre misusing power, but will cooperate'

RAIPUR, 18 JULY

Fresh raids by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday have triggered a political outcry in Chhattisgarh, with former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel accusing the BJP-led central government of misusing investigative agencies to target opposition leaders.

The ED searched Baghel's residence in Bhilai—shared with his son Chaitanya Baghel—before arresting Chaitanya under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in connection with an alleged Rs 2,100 crore liquor scam. The timing of the raid, which coincided with Chaitanya's birthday, drew sharp criticism.



"Thanks for this gift Modi and Shah won't break my resolve," said Baghel, vowing full cooperation while accusing the Centre of undermining democracy.

In protest, Congress MLAs walked out of the Legislative Assembly's final monsoon session.

The ED alleges Chaitanya was a beneficiary of illicit liquor proceeds generated during Congress rule (2019–2022).

So far, assets worth Rs 205 crore have been attached, and several individuals, including ex-minister Kawasi Lakhma and former IAS officer Anil Tuteja, have been arrested.

Baghel also noted raid's timing, coinciding with a planned debate on deforestation linked to an Adani-operated coal mine. *—PTI*

Justice Varma seeks SC's probe report

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma has moved the Supreme Court, seeking to invalidate a report by an in-house inquiry panel, which found him guilty of misconduct in the cash discovery row.

Varma has sought quashing of the 8 May recommendation by then CJI Sanjiv Khanna, urging the Parliament to initiate impeachment process against him. Though Justice Varma denied any wrongdoing, the inquiry panel had concluded otherwise.

The government plans to move a motion to remove Varma in Parliament's Monsoon session beginning 21 July.

Congress to support

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said on Friday that his party will support and its MPs will be among the signatories to the motion to be brought against Justice Varma in the Lok Sabha.

He said then-CJI Sanjiv Khanna had "forced our hand" in the matter by writing to the President and the PM.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju also said on Friday that all political parties are on board on the issue of the impeachment of Justice Yashwant Varma, from whose residence burnt wads of currency notes were found.

"I have spoken to all the senior leaders of different political parties. I will also get in touch with some of the single-MP parties because I do not want to leave out any member. So it becomes a unified stand of the Parliament of India," Rijiju said. *— PTI*

A unique day for Tamil speaking people: Stalin

TAMIL NADU, 18 JULY

On the occasion of Tamil Nadu Day, Chief Minister MK Stalin shared a post on X on Friday, noting that this day in 1967 marked the transformation of the first line of this land's identity and is a unique day in the history of the Tamil-speaking world.

He said in a post, "A unique day in the history of the Tamil-speaking world! 18 July, 1967: The day the DMK movement assumed power, transforming the very first line of this land's identity."

On this day, the name of Tamil Nadu was officially adopted, fulfilling a dream cherished in our hearts for ages, CM Stalin stated in the post.

The DMK government had declared 18 July as Tamil Nadu Day in 2022 by rescinding an earlier order of the previous AIADMK government to celebrate 1 November. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

J&K: Mirwaiz claims he is under house arrest

SRINAGAR, 18 JULY

Hurriyat Conference Chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq claimed to have been placed under house detention for the second consecutive Friday. "For second consecutive Friday I remain under house detention - with every lane and by-lane to my residence barricaded, causing inconvenience to the entire neighbourhood," Mirwaiz said in a post on X. The Hurriyat leader was placed under house arrest on 11 July, two days ahead of the 13 July, commemoration function for martyrs of 1931. 'Martyrs Day' in J&K is a tribute to 22 people killed by the Dogra army outside Srinagar's central jail in 1931. *—PTI*

M'rashtra's Islampur renamed to Ishwarpur

MUMBAI, 18 JULY

Maharashtra Government on Friday announced that Islampur in Sangli district is being renamed as Ishwarpur. The announcement was made in the state legislature on the last day of the monsoon session. The move came after a Hindutva organization, Shiv Pratisthan, sent a memorandum to the Sangli collectorate demanding that Islampur's name be changed to Ishwarpur. Shiv Pratishtan is headed by Sambhaji Bhide whose supporters have said that they would not rest until the demand is met. A Shiv Sena leader from Islampur said that the demand for a change in name has been pending since 1986. *—PTI*

Hindu group in UP shuts down non-veg hotels

VARANASI, 18 JULY

In Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, members of the Hindu Raksha Dal forcibly shut down non-vegetarian restaurants, including major chains like KFC and local eateries such as Nazir, demanding a complete ban on meat sales during the holy month of Sawan.

Though the state government had only ordered meat shop closures along official Kanwar Yatra routes, the group extended action into residential areas, sparking concerns over vigilantism.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, speaking at a seminar, accused critics of trying to defame Kanwar pilgrims by calling them as rioters & extremists. *— Agencies*

TO CURB FRAUD

'Only Hindus, Buddhists & Sikhs are SCs'

MUMBAI, 18 JULY

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday said that if a person belonging to a religion other than Hinduism, Buddhism or Sikhism has obtained a Scheduled Caste (SC) certificate fraudulently, it will be cancelled.

Action will be taken against such a person if he or she has secured reservation benefits, such as government jobs. If such a person has won an election using a fraudulently obtained SC certificate, their election will be declared null and void, Fadnavis said in the legislative council.

Replying to a calling attention motion, he also said the state government intends to bring in strong provisions to deal with cases of religious conversion through coercion and cheating.

- If such a person has won an election using a fraudulently obtained SC certificate, their election will be declared null and void, Fadnavis said in the legislative council.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis **PHOTO: ANI**

Amit Gorkhe (BJP) had claimed that freedom of religion was being misused by "crypto Christians", and some people benefit from reservations under the SC category while professing other religions.

"Crypto Christians" was an apparent reference to people who discreetly follow Christianity while belonging to a different religion on paper.

On the face of it, they belong to an SC community and get reservation benefits like government jobs, he had said.

Fadnavis said that the Supreme Court, on 26 November last year, gave a verdict in which it made it clear that the Scheduled Castes category reservation can be availed only by Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs, and not by those belonging to other religions. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

HC acquits 3 in murder over lack of evidence

KOLKATA, 18 JULY

The Calcutta High Court has overturned the death sentence of three individuals, including Surojit Deb, in connection with the 2014 murder of his estranged wife, Jayanti Deb. Her dismembered body was found stuffed in luggage at Sealdah Railway Station. A division bench ruled that the prosecution had failed to prove the charges beyond reasonable doubt. Co-accused Lipika Poddar and Sanjoy Biswas were also acquitted. The defence argued there was no evidence linking the accused to the scene or the crime, and claimed they were falsely implicated. It was alleged that Surojit lived with Lipika. He along with Lipika killed Jayanti and made Surojit dispose of the body. The court set aside the conviction and ordered their immediate release, criticising the lack of credible evidence. —*PTI*

3 elephants run over by train in WB

JHARGRAM, 18 JULY

Three elephants, including two calves, were killed after being hit by a speeding express train near Banstala railway station in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district on Thursday night. The animals were part of a herd of around 30 elephants, likely migrating from Jharkhand's Dalma forest. The incident occurred on the Kharagpur-Tatanagar section when the Janshatabdi Express struck them while they were crossing the tracks. Forest officials said it was initially difficult to approach the site due to the presence of the herd. The area forms part of an elephant corridor, and an investigation is underway to determine whether safety protocols were followed to prevent such accidents. —*PTI*

Headmistress suspended over boy's electrocution

T'PURAM, 18 JULY

A day after 13-year-old Mithun was fatally electrocuted at Thevalakkara Boys High School in Kerala's Kollam district, the state government has taken urgent action. General Education Minister V Sivankutty announced the suspension of the headmistress and issued a show-cause notice to the school management, demanding a response within three days. A May circular had already warned schools to inspect electrical hazards. "There can be no excuse," the minister said. Further steps include reorganising the Parent-Teacher Association and seeking an explanation from the Assistant Educational Officer. Mithun's family was offered Rs 3 lakh in aid, a new house and free education for his younger sibling up to class 12. —*PTI*

Man's nose slashed for scolding dog; 2 held

NOIDA, 18 JULY

Two men have been arrested and a third is on the run after allegedly attacking their neighbour in Nat Ki Madaiya village in Uttar Pradesh's Noida, for scolding their pet dog. The incident occurred on 8 July, when Devendra, the victim, reprimanded the neighbour's dog for barking. In retaliation, Satish, his brother Amit and son Tushar allegedly assaulted Devendra and his wife, Munni Devi. Devendra's nose was reportedly slashed with a sharp weapon, requiring stitches. He is currently being treated. An FIR was filed based on a complaint from Devendra's father. Two suspects have been arrested, while efforts to apprehend the third are ongoing. A case was registered. —*PTI*

Execution of Indian nurse in Yemen stayed: SC

Blood money can be paid only after accused gets pardon

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

The nurse from Palakkad was convicted of murdering her Yemeni business partner and disposing off his body in an underground tank PHOTO: X

The Supreme Court was on Friday informed that the execution of Indian nurse Nimisha Priya, who is on death row for murder in Yemen, has been stayed.

Attorney General R Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre, told a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta that "efforts are on" in the matter.

The top law officer said the government wants Priya to come back safely.

"They (government) are taking good care of whatever is possible," the bench observed.

The counsel appearing for the petitioner said they have to first get pardon and then the issue of "blood money" would come.

The petitioner informed the court that the execution has been postponed.

The bench posted the matter for further hearing on 14 August.

The apex court was hearing a plea seeking a direction to the Centre to use diplomatic channels to save Priya, 38, facing execution in Yemen.

The execution was earlier scheduled for 16 July.

Priya, a nurse from Palakkad district of Kerala, was convicted of murdering her Yemeni business partner in 2017. She was sentenced to death in 2020, and her final appeal was rejected in 2023.

She is alleged to have drugged and murdered her Yemeni business partner along with a fellow nurse. They had reportedly chopped his body and disposed the boduy parts by throwing them into an undergrpound tank.

She is currently imprisoned in a jail in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen.

Priya's mother is in Yemen at present to negotiate with the victim's family.

The counsel for the Centre said that the Indian government was making concerted afforts to buy more time for Pruya's family. —*PTI*

FAUJA SINGH TO BE CREMATED ON 20 JULY

CHANDIGARH, 18 JUL

The last rites for Fauja Singh, the world's oldest marathoner at 114 years old, will take place on Sunday at his village in Beas, Jalandhar. His son, Harvinder Singh, confirmed that family members from abroad are arriving to pay their respects. Singh tragically lost his life after being struck by an SUV driven by 26-year-old Amritpal Singh Dhillon, who was arrested and is currently in judicial custody. Harvinder expressed his disappointment over Dhillon's failure to stop and assist his father after the incident. Fauja Singh, known as the "Turbaned Tornado," began his marathon career at 89 and inspired many with his remarkable endurance, completing prestigious marathons worldwide before retiring three years ago. —*PTI*

Police personnel hold a man arrested with 3.5 kg heroin in Ferozepur as part of Punjab's intensified anti-narcotics crackdown PHOTO: PTI

Punjab anti-drug campaign: 22,000 smugglers held

CHANDIGARH, 18 JULY

Over 22,000 narcotic smugglers have been arrested so far under a state-level campaign against drugs.

Under the 'Yudh Nashian Virudh' (war against drugs) campaign, Punjab Police on 17 July arrested 113 drug smugglers and recovered 1.5 kg heroin, 5 kg opium, and 31,237 intoxicant pills from their possession.

With this, the number of total drug smugglers arrested in 138 days of the campaign has reached 22,377.

Special DGP (Law and Order) Arpit Shukla stated that over 180 police teams, comprising over 1,300 police personnel, under the supervision of 93 gazetted officers, conducted raids at as many as 433 locations across the state on Thursday.

The operation led to the registration of 81 FIRs across the state. Police teams also checked 483 suspicious persons in the exercise.

The state government has also constituted a five-member cabinet subcommittee led by Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema to monitor the war against drugs. The state government has implemented a three-pronged strategy — enforcement, de-addiction and prevention— to eradicate drugs from the state. —*PTI*

De-addiction centres selling drugs: ED

CHANDIGARH, 18 JULY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday raided multiple locations in Punjab and Mumbai in money laundering investigation linked to "illegal" sale of drugs by private de-addiction centres.

FIR were filed against a doctor Amit Bansal, a pharmaceutical company, a drugs inspector, Rupinder Kaur and some others.

Bansal illegally sold drugs through his 22 drugs de-addiction centres across Punjab. Kaur allegedly assisted him in forwarding incorrect inspection report related to pilferage of medicine.

The raids are being conducted in Punjab's Chandigarh, Ludhiana and Barnala and Maharashtra's Mumbai.

Private de-addiction centres were directed by the state giverment to give BNX (Buprenorphine/Naloxone) medicine to patients to help them wean away from narcotics.

However, these medication were being taken in "excess," leading to a "new kind of drug abuse." —*PTI*

TO A SAFER PLACE

A man shifts his belongings to a safer place in the flooded Daraganj as the swollen Ganga inundates areas in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj on Friday PHOTO: PTI

Bihar hospital shooting: Police identifies accused

PATNA, 18 JULY

The Bihar police have identified four of the five accused in connection with the murder of a prisoner on parole in the ICU of Paras Hospital in the state capital, reports said on Friday.

Patna (central) Superintendent of Police Diksha said the victim, "Chandan Mishra, convicted in a murder case, was lodged at Beur Jail and had gone to the hospital for treatment on parole. He was involved in 24 criminal cases, including more than 12 murder cases."

Police identified the prime accused as Tausif alias Badshah, a resident of Phulwari Sharif in Patna.

The other three accused are Mannu, Surajbhan and Balwant Singh.

One shooter has not been identified, sources in the police said.

Tausif hails from Patna, while Mannu belonging to Belaur village and Balwant Singh to Liladharpur village, both in Buxar district.

Police have launched manhunts at multiple locations in Phulwari Sharif and Buxar to locate the accused and investigate their network.

Chandan Mishra's father Mantu Mishra has filed an FIR at Patna's Shastri Nagar police station —*Agencies*

Drishti IAS founder moves HC

JAIPUR, 18 JULY

Drishti IAS coaching institute founder and social media influencer Vikas Divyakirti has moved the Rajasthan High Court against a defamation complaint filed against him at an Ajmer court. The complaint pertains to a video in which Divyakirti allegedly made some comments on the functioning of the legal system and the judiciary. The matter came to light when an advocate, Sumeer Sodhi, filed a petition in an Ajmer court. —*PTI*

NHRC in PIL for law on mental health

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the National Human Right Commission to be made a party to the PIL for the implementation of a 2017 law on safeguarding the rights and needs of persons with mental illnesses.

A bench asked petitioner Gaurav Kumar Bansal to file an application to make rights body NHRC a party to the PIL filed in 2018.

The bench said the PIL may be transferred to the NHRC for implementing the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. Bansal said a committee headed by a former apex court judge could be set up to oversee the implementation.

"We cannot create a parallel mechanism just because the existing system has any flaws," the bench said.

The bench asked Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, representing the Centre, to share its affidavit with Bansal and posted the hearing after three weeks. —*PTI*

PIL ON BPSC CHIEF'S POST REJECTED

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

The Supreme Court on Friday rejected a PIL challenging the appointment of Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) chairperson Parmar Ravi Manubhai after observing that an FIR against him was closed.

"Please do not go behind this publicity business, it will ruin you... you should have read the facts," a bench of Justices PS Narasimha and Atul Chandurkar told the petitioner. —*PTI*

Orange alert in Himachal; 250 roads closed

People try to remove a boulder off a damaged car after rainfall in Shimla Himachal Pradesh on Friday PHOTO: PTI

SHIMLA, 18 JULY

Heavy rainfall has forced the closure of 250 roads across Himachal Pradesh, with the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC) reporting severe disruptions, particularly in Mandi district (181 roads shut), Sirmaur (26), and Kullu (23). Sixty-one water supply schemes and 81 power transformers have been affected.

The local Met Office has issued an orange alert for heavy to very heavy rain in isolated areas on 21 and 23 July, and a yellow alert remains in place until Sunday.

Since the monsoon began on 20 June, 112 people have died, 67 due to rain-related incidents and 45 in road accidents while 199 have been injured and 35 are missing.

The state has experienced 31 flash floods, 22 cloudbursts, and 19 landslides, with estimated damages exceeding Rs 1,220 crore. —*PTI*

'No physical intimacy, doubting husband's fidelity ground for divorce'

MUMBAI, 18 JULY

The Bombay High Court has upheld a family court's decision granting divorce to a man on grounds of cruelty by his wife. The court held that denying physical intimacy and repeatedly suspecting her husband of infidelity amounted to cruelty.

Married in 2013, the husband filed for divorce in 2015, citing public humiliation, mental agony, and mistreatment of his disabled sister. He also alleged that his wife embarrassed him in front of friends, family, and employees. The wife challenged the divorce and sought Rs 1 lakh monthly maintenance, claiming she still loved her husband and didn't wish the marriage to end. Dismissing the plea, the court ruled that the wife's conduct had caused irreparable harm and distress. —*PTI*

STUDENTS UNDER THREAT

Mental peace disturbed: Parents shaken by bomb scare

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

- Vikram Singh, whose daughter attends Sovereign School in Rohini, said, "Even if nothing serious is found, these hoax emails disturb the mental peace of children and parents. After a discussion among parents, many of us decided to skip school for a day." The situation in Sovereign School remained under control.

Several parents across Delhi chose to keep their children home on Friday after around 45 schools received bomb threats via email for the fourth time this week.

While institutions operated with caution and authorities later confirmed all threats to be hoaxes, the ongoing pattern has raised concerns among families.

"I did not send my son today. It is not that we are panicking, but after repeated incidents, it feels safer to wait things out," said Parmita Sharma, a parent whose child studies at Richmond School, Paschim Vihar.

Vikram Singh, whose daughter attends Sovereign School in Rohini, said, "Even if nothing serious is found, these hoax emails disturb the mental peace of children and parents. Many of us decided to skip school for a day," he said.

At the Sovereign Public School the situation remained under control. The school resumed regular classes after a police inspection found nothing suspicious.

"We informed the authorities immediately upon receiving the email. The building was cleared after a full check, and we are conducting classes normally," school chairperson RK Jindal said.

Some schools experienced some evacuations and a cautious handling of students present on campus.

Delhi police along with bomb squads and fire services, inspected all affected schools, including institutions in Dwarka, Rohini, Vasant Vihar, Janakpuri, and East of Kailash.

"All threats have been declared hoaxes after inspections," a senior police official confirmed, adding that investigations into the source of the emails are underway. —*PTI*

Security personnel at the Heritage School in New Delhi after it received a bomb threat on Friday PHOTO: PTI

DIABETIC BARBIE

Mattel's recently launched its latest Barbie in collaboration with Lila Moss, a British model who lives with type 1 diabetes. The doll comes with a visible insulin pump and a continuous glucose monitor, devices many people with diabetes rely on. To some people, this might seem like just another version of the doll. But to kids living with type 1 diabetes, this is not just a toy, it's about them being seen. Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition where the body stops making insulin, the hormone that helps control blood sugar levels and often starts in childhood

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Syrians return to looted homes & bodies on streets

A Syrian Druze woman living in the UAE frantically tried to keep in touch with her family in her hometown in southern Syria as clashes raged there over the past days.

Her mother, father and sister sent videos of their neighbours fleeing as fighters moved in. The explosions from shelling were non-stop, hitting near their house. Her family took shelter in the basement. When she reached them later in a video call, they said her father was missing. He had gone out during a lull to check the situation and never returned.

Hours later, they learned he had been shot and killed by a sniper.

A ceasefire went into effect late Wednesday, easing days of brutal clashes in Sweida. Now, members of its Druze community who fled or went into hiding are returning to search for loved ones and count their losses. They are finding homes looted and bloodied bodies of civilians in the streets.

The fighting began with tit-for-tat kidnappings and attacks between local Sunni Bedouin tribes and Druze militias in the majority-Druze Sweida province. Government forces that intervened to restore order clashed with the Druze militias, but also in some cases attacked civilians.

At least 600 people — combatants and civilians on both sides — were killed in four days of clashes, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor. It said the dead included more than 80 civilians, mostly Druze, who were rounded up by fighters and collectively shot to death in what the monitor called "field executions."

"These are not individual acts but systemic," the Observatory's director Rami Abdul-Rahman told the AP. "All the violations are there. You can see from the bodies that are all over the streets in Sweida clearly show they're shot in the head."

In response, Druze militias have targeted Bedouin families in revenge attacks since the ceasefire was reached. Footage shared on Syrian state media shows Bedouin families putting their belongings in trucks and fleeing with reports of renewed skirmishes in those areas. There was no word on casualties in those attacks.

The Druze religious sect is an offshoot of Ismailism, a branch of Shiite Islam. More than half of the roughly 1 million Druze worldwide live in Syria

One Syrian-American Druze told the AP of his fear as he watched the clashes from the US and tried to account for his family and friends whom he had seen in a recent trip to his native city Sweida.

Despite internet and communications breakdowns, he tracked down his family. His mother and brother fled because their home was shelled and raided, he said. Their belongings were stole, windows shattered. Their neighbours' house was burned down. Two other neighbours were killed, one by shelling, another by stray bullets, he said.

It showed gunmen in military uniform forcing a number of men in civilian clothes to kneel in the street in a well-known roundabout in Sweida. The gunmen then spray the men with automatic fire, their bodies dropping to the ground.

To his horror, he recognized the men. One was a close family friend — another Syrian-American on a visit to Sweida from the US. The others were the friend's brother, father, three uncles and a cousin. Friends he reached told him that government forces had raided the house where they were all staying and took them outside and shot them.

Footage widely circulated on social media showed some of the carnage. One video shows a living room with several bodies on the floor and bullet holes in the walls and sofa.

In another, there are at least nine bloodied bodies in one room of the home of a family that took in people fleeing the fighting. Portraits of Druze notables are visible, smashed on the floor.

Evelyn Azzam, a Druze woman, is searching the Damascus suburb of Jaramana, trying to find out what happened to her husband, Robert Kiwan.

Last week, the 23-year-old Kiwan left home in Jaramana early as he does every day to commute to his job in Sweida.

He got caught up in the chaos when the clashes erupted. Azzam was on the phone with him as government forces questioned him and his coworkers. She heard a gunshot when one of the coworkers raised his voice. She heard her husband trying to appeal to the soldiers.

Then she heard another gunshot; her husband was shot in the hip. An ambulance took him to a hospital, where she later learned he underwent an operation. But she hasn't heard anything since and doesn't know if he survived. *—PTI*

Security members carry belongings as they leave the damaged Syrian Defense Ministry building allegedly hit by Israeli airstrikes in Damascus

PHOTO: PTI

SALAR

Internet shutdown further limits Russia's net freedom

A snappy tune by a blogger that mockingly laments his poor internet connection in the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don has gotten over a half-million views on Instagram in two weeks.

"How to say you're from Rostov without saying a word? Show one bar of cellphone service," Pavel Osipyan raps while walking around the city, smartphone in hand. "We have internet until 12 o'clock, and recently there's been no connection at all. No need to be angry, just get used to it already."

The complaints by Osipyan — unable to pay electronically for groceries, or having to use paper maps while driving — aren't isolated to Rostov-on-Don, which borders Ukraine and, as home to Russia's Southern Military District, is targeted frequently by drones.

In the last two months, cellphone internet shutdowns, which officials say are needed to foil Ukrainian drones, have hit dozens of Russian regions — from those near the fighting to parts of Siberia and even the Far East. Some Wi-Fi outages also have been reported.

Russians contacted by The Associated Press talked about card payments not going through, taxi and ride-sharing apps not working properly, ATMs that sometimes fail.

Experts point to the unprecedented nature of the measures and warn of far-reaching consequences in a country where the Kremlin already has significantly curtailed online freedom.

Experts say the trend began in May, when Russia celebrated the 80th anniversary of the defeat of the Nazi Germany in World War II and foreign dignitaries flocked to Moscow for a big military parade.

The capital suffered severe disruptions of cellphone connectivity to the internet for days, and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed those were deliberate restrictions due to regular Ukrainian drone attacks. Asked how long they'd last, he replied, "This will be done as needed."

Russia has restricted smartphone connectivity before, with isolated instances during protests, as well as in regions bordering Ukraine.

Shutdowns in the capital, however, sent a signal to authorities across the vast country that it's a useful tool, said lawyer Sarkis Darbinyan, founder of Russian internet freedom group Roskomsvoboda.

Ukraine's "Operation Spiderweb" in early June, in which drones launched from containers on trucks attacked airfields deep inside Russia, made officials all the more eager to take action, Darbinyan said.

By mid-July, deliberate shutdowns spread to most of the country, according to Na Svyazi — Russian for "staying connected" — an activist group tracking internet availability.

On Tuesday, the group reported cellphone internet shutdowns in 73 of over 80 regions.

Some regional officials confirmed that cellphone internet was restricted for security reasons.

Russians from affected regions say the outages can last for hours or days; patterns also are hard to discern, with service working in one part of a city but vanishing elsewhere.

In Voronezh, near Ukraine and frequently targeted by drones, one resident said she felt like she was in "a cave" in early July with no cellphone internet or Wi-Fi in her home. The woman, who spoke to AP on condition of anonymity because of security concerns, said she was only able to get online at work the next day.

Cellphone internet in the southwestern city of Samara "goes out at the most unpredictable moments," said Natalia, who also spoke on condition that her last name be withheld for safety reasons. Her home Wi-Fi recently also has slowed to a near halt around 11pm, staying that way for a few hours, she said.

Connectivity has improved recently in the Siberian city of Omsk, said Viktor Shkurenko, who owns retail stores and other businesses there. But cellphone internet service was out in his office for an entire week.

In rural areas, small towns and villages, where cellphone internet often is the only way to get online, the situation was harder to gauge.

Pharmacies in such areas have struggled, Russian media reported and the Independent Pharmacies Association confirmed to AP.

Authorities elsewhere also announced steps to minimize disruptions by opening Wi-Fi spots

Russian and Ukrainian drones use cellphone internet networks to operate, so shutdowns are one way authorities try to counter the attacks, said Kateryna Stepanenko, a Russia analyst at the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War.

But it's also part of the Kremlin's long-term effort to rein in the internet. Authorities have actively censored online content in the last decade, blocking thousands of websites of independent media, opposition groups and human rights organizations.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the government blocked major social media like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, as well as encrypted messenger platform Signal and a few other messaging apps.

The Kremlin blamed YouTube owner Google for not properly maintaining its hardware in Russia.

State internet watchdogs routinely block virtual private network services that help circumvent the restrictions, and there are plans to introduce a national messenger app, expected to replace foreign ones. *—PTI*

Experts point to the unprecedented nature of the measures and warn of far-reaching consequences in a country where the Kremlin already has significantly curtailed online freedom ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Medical breakthrough as babies are born with DNA from 3 people

Ten years after the UK became the first country to legalise mitochondrial donation, the first results from the use of these high-profile reproductive technologies – designed to prevent passing on genetic disorders – have finally been published.

So far, eight children have been born, all reportedly healthy, thanks to the long-term efforts of scientists and doctors in Newcastle, England. Should this be a cause for excitement, disappointment or concern? Perhaps, I would suggest, it could be a bit of all three.

The New England Journal of Medicine has published two papers on a groundbreaking fertility treatment that could prevent devastating inherited diseases. The technique, called mitochondrial donation, was used to help 22 women who carry faulty genes that would otherwise pass serious genetic disorders – such as Leigh syndrome – to their children. These disorders affect the body's ability to produce energy at the cellular level and can cause severe disability or death in babies.

The technique, developed by the Newcastle team, involves creating an embryo using DNA from three people: nuclear DNA from the intended mother and father, and healthy mitochondrial DNA from a donor egg. During the parliamentary debates leading up to The Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Mitochondrial Donation) Regulations in 2015, there were concerns about the effectiveness of the procedure and its potential side-effects.

The announcement that this technology has led to the birth of eight apparently healthy children therefore marks a major scientific achievement for the UK, which has been widely praised by numerous scientists and patient support groups. However, these results should not detract from some important questions they also raise.

First, why has it taken so long for any updates on the application of this technology, including its outcomes and its limitations, to be made public? Especially given the significant public financial investment made into its development.

In a country positioning itself as a leader in the governance and practice of reproductive and genomic medicine, transparency should be a central principle. Transparency not only supports the progress of other research teams but also keeps the public and patients well informed.

Second, what is the significance of these results? While eight babies were born using this technology, this figure contrasts starkly with the predicted number of 150 babies per year likely to be born using the technique.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, the UK regulator in this area, has approved 32 applications since 2017 when the Newcastle team obtained its licence, but the technique was used with only 22 of them, resulting in eight babies. Does this constitute sufficiently robust data to prove the effectiveness of the technology and was it worth the considerable efforts and investments over almost two decades of campaigning, debate and research?

As I wrote when this law was passed, officials should have been more realistic about how many people this treatment could actually help. By overestimating the number of patients who might benefit, they risked giving false hope to families who wouldn't be eligible for the procedure.

Third, is it safe enough? In two of the eight cases, the babies showed higher levels of maternal mitochondrial DNA, meaning the risk of developing a mitochondrial disorder cannot be ruled out. This potential for a "reversal" – where the faulty mitochondria reassert themselves – was also highlighted in a recent study conducted in Greece involving patients who used technique to treat infertility problems.

So far, eight children in the world with DNA from three people have been born, all reportedly healthy, with the long-term efforts of scientists and doctors in Newcastle, England ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

- Breakthroughs come with responsibilities. If UK wants to maintain its position as a leader in reproductive medicine, it must be more transparent about both the successes and limitations of this technology.

As a result, the technology is no longer framed by the Newcastle team as a way to prevent the transmission of mitochondrial disorders, but rather to reduce the risk. But is the risk reduction enough to justify offering the technique to more patients? And what will the risk of reassertion mean for the children born through it and their parents, who may live with the continuing uncertainty that the condition could emerge later in life?

As some experts have suggested, it may be worth testing this technology on women who have fertility problems but don't carry mitochondrial diseases. This would help doctors better understand the risks of the faulty mitochondria coming back, before using the technique only on women who could pass these serious genetic conditions to their children.

This leads to a fourth question. What has been the patient experience with this technology? It would be valuable to know how many people applied for mitochondrial donation, why some were not approved, and, among those 32 approved cases, why only 22 proceeded with treatment.

It also raises important questions about how patients who were either unable to access the technology, or for whom it was ultimately unsuccessful feel, particularly after investing significant time, effort and hope in the process. How do they come to terms with not having the healthy biological child they had been offered?

This is not to say we shouldn't celebrate these births and what they represent for UK in terms of scientific achievement. Breakthroughs come with responsibilities.

If UK wants to maintain its position as a leader in reproductive medicine, it must be more transparent about both the successes and limitations of this technology. *—PTI*

Indian-origin man, US officials face visa fraud charges

NEW YORK, 18 JULY

An Indian-origin businessman, Chandrakant Patel, alongside four US law enforcement officials—including three police chiefs—has been indicted in Louisiana for visa fraud. The charges, brought in Lafayette, centre on the creation of false crime reports to facilitate visa applications under the US government's U visa programme, which is designated for victims of specific crimes experiencing mental or physical abuse. According to court documents, immigrants approached Patel, who allegedly arranged to have them falsely reported as victims of an armed robbery to support their U visa claims, charging them thousands of dollars in the process. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

CBS to end Stephen Colbert's show in May 2026

NEW YORK, 18 JULY

CBS is cancelling "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert" next May, shuttering a decades-old TV institution in a changing media landscape and removing from air one of President Donald Trump's most prominent and persistent late-night critics. Thursday's announcement followed Colbert's criticism on Monday of a settlement between Trump and Paramount Global, parent company of CBS, over a "60 Minutes" story. Colbert told his audience that he had learned Wednesday night that after a decade on air, "next year will be our last season. ... It's the end of 'The Late Show' on CBS. I'm not being replaced. This is all just going away." The audience responded with boos and groans. "Yeah, I share your feelings," the 61-year-old said. *—PTI*

Thailand's monks accused of $12M sex-blackmail

BANGKOK, 18 JULY

Thailand's Buddhist clergy is embroiled in a major scandal, with at least 11 monks accused of breaking their celibacy vows and engaging in extortion involving nearly $12 million in temple funds. A woman allegedly seduced the monks, secretly recorded their encounters, and demanded hush money, leaving many Thais shocked. King Maha Vajiralongkorn condemned the monks' behaviour as "inappropriate" and has cancelled their participation in his upcoming birthday event. All involved monks have been defrocked, and a police investigation is underway, with a task force established to probe further misconduct within temples. Critics highlight a history of corruption in the monkhood. *—Agencies*

Germany deports 2nd lot of Afghans post Taliban return

BERLIN, 18 JULY

Germany has deported 81 Afghan nationals to their homeland, marking the second deportation since the Taliban regained control and the first under the new government that has promised a stringent migration policy. The deportees, all men previously noted by judicial authorities, were flown out on a chartered flight with assistance from Qatar. This action follows a similar deportation over ten months ago, initiated by former Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who had pledged to increase deportations of asylum seekers. New Chancellor Friedrich Merz has made a tough stance on migration a priority since taking office in May, implementing measures such as increased border police presence and suspensions of family reunification for many migrants. *—PTI*

594 PEOPLE have been killed overall; 300 of the Druze minority, including 154 civilians; 257 govt personnel and 21 of the Bedouin minority, including 3 civilians

Druze from Syria and Israel protest on the Israeli-Syrian border at Majdal Shams in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

CEASEFIRE BREAKS IN SYRIA AGAIN

Forces re-enter Sweida amid fresh clashes

DAMASCUS, 18 JULY

Renewed clashes broke out overnight between Druze armed groups and members of Bedouin clans in southern Syria, and government forces were preparing to deploy again to the area Friday after pulling out under a ceasefire agreement that halted several days of violence earlier this week, officials said.

Government security forces agreed with some of the Druze factions that they would re-enter the area to impose stability and protect state institutions, according to two Syrian officials on Friday.

Syrian government forces had largely pulled out of the Druze-majority southern province of Sweida after days of clashes with militias linked to the Druze religious minority that threatened to unravel the country's fragile post-war transition.

Neighbouring Israel had begun bombing Syrian forces, including the Defence Ministry in Damascus, before majority of the fighting was halted with a Wednesday ceasefire, mediated by US, Turkey and Arab countries. Under that agreement, Druze factions and clerics would be left to maintain internal security in Sweida, Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa said Thursday.

After the ceasefire and withdrawal of government forces, clashes once again flared between the Druze and Bedouin groups in parts of Sweida province. State media reported Druze militias carried out revenge attacks against Bedouin communities, leading to a wave of displacement.

The clashes initially began between Druze militias and local Sunni Muslim Bedouin tribes Sunday before government forces intervened and took the Bedouins' side against the Druze.

Israel had launched dozens of airstrikes on convoys of government fighters and striking the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters in central Damascus in a major escalation of its involvement.

The Druze form a substantial community in Israel and often serve in the Israeli military.

The UN accused both the government and Druze fighters of summary executions – executions without a trial. *—PTI*

> **The US did not support recent Israeli strikes. We are engaging diplomatically with Israel and Syria at the highest levels, both to address the present crisis and reach a lasting agreement between the two sovereign states**
>
> —Tammy Bruce, US Department of State Spokesperson

EU, UK hit Russia with tougher curbs

BRUSSELS, 18 JULY

The European Union and Britain on Friday ramped up pressure on Russia over its war on Ukraine, targeting Moscow's energy sector, shadow fleet of aging oil tankers and military intelligence service with new sanctions.

The last raft of EU sanctions, imposed on 20 May, targeted almost 200 ships in Russia's sanction-busting shadow fleet of tankers. On Friday, 105 more ships were blocked from European ports, locks and from ship-to-ship transfers, bringing the total number of vessels now sanctioned to more than 400.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed the new measures, describing them as a "timely and necessary" step amid intensified Russian attacks, adding, "all infrastructure of Russia's war must be blocked".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov brushed off the EU move, saying that "we consider such unilateral restrictions unlawful".

"At the same time, we have acquired certain immunity from sanctions. We have adapted to living under sanctions," Peskov said.

The UK, meanwhile, imposed sanctions on units of Russia's military intelligence service, GRU. Also added to the list were 18 officers the UK said helped to plan a bomb attack on a theatre in southern Ukraine in 2022 and to target the family of a former Russian spy who was later poisoned with a nerve agent.

Hundreds of civilians in Mariupol were killed in March 2022. *—PTI*

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed the new measures, describing them as a "timely and necessary" step amid intensified Russian attacks

China issues safety alert to its students in Philippines

BEIJING, 18 JULY

China's Education Ministry issued a safety warning for Chinese students in the Philippines after what it said were a series of criminal incidents targeting them.

The brief warning Friday did not identify any specific incidents but told students to increase their safety awareness should they choose to study in the Philippines. The number of Chinese students in the country was not given but enrolments have fallen to just a few hundred in recent years, according to the Hong Kong newspaper South China Morning Post.

Relations between the governments of China and the Philippines are particularly tense due to disputes over maritime claims in the South China Sea, which China claims almost in its entirety. China has used water cannons and other non-lethal shipboard deterrents to drive off Philippine fishing boats.

In April, China issued a similar warning about the risk to Chinese students in the United States. *—PTI*

Bombed Gaza church by mistake: Bibi

WASHINGTON, 18 JULY

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had admitted that Tel Aviv had made a "mistake" by striking the sole Catholic Church in Gaza during a call with US President Donald Trump, the White House stated.

During a press briefing on Friday (local time), White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt stated that Trump held a phone call with Netanyahu to address the strike, noting that there was "not a positive reaction" from the US President.

"He called Netanyahu this morning to address the strikes on that church in Gaza. It was a mistake by the Israelis to hit that Catholic church. That's what the Prime Minister relayed to the President," Leavitt said.

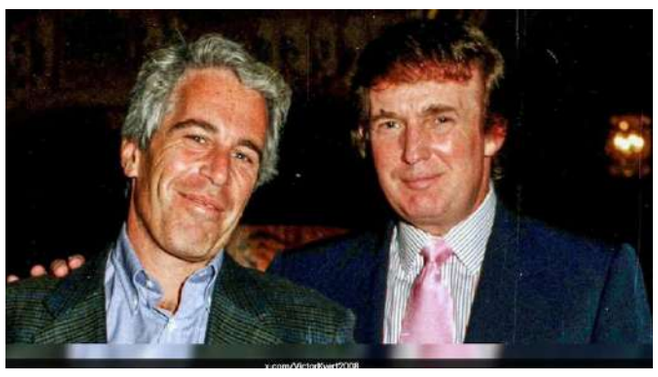
Al Jazeera reported that three people were killed in the strike *PHOTO: X*

"Israel deeply regrets that a stray ammunition hit Gaza's Holy Family Church. Every innocent life lost is a tragedy," the statement from the Israeli Prime Minister's Office read.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) also addressed the issue, noting that a shell fired during military operations in the area may have hit the church by "mistake".

According to Al Jazeera, three people were killed and at least ten more were injured during the strike. *—ANI*

Trump changes mind, wants release of Epstein files



US President Donal's Trump's directive comes after Federal officers claimed that Jeffrey Epstein did not maintain a client list *PHOTO: X*

WASHINGTON, 18 JULY

US President Donald Trump on Friday called for the release of Grand Jury transcripts related to the alleged sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein investigations, labelling the whole issue a "SCAM".

"Based on the ridiculous amount of publicity given to Jeffrey Epstein, I have asked Attorney General Pam Bondi to produce any and all pertinent Grand Jury testimony, subject to Court approval," Trump wrote on Truth Social. "This SCAM, perpetuated by the Democrats, should end right now."Trump's directive comes after Federal officers claimed that Epstein did not maintain a client list, even though Bondi had earlier claimed it was "sitting on her desk".

Trump's announcement also came just hours after The Wall Street Journal published a report alleging that he had written a letter to Epstein for his 50th birthday in 2003. According to the Journal, the letter included several lines "framed by the outline of a naked woman" and ended with, "Happy Birthday -- and may every day be another wonderful secret."

Trump denied termed the claims "fake, malicious, and defamatory," and expressed his plan to sue the WSJ, News Corp., and Rupert Murdoch. His ties to Epstein have been well-documented, though the President has not been accused of misconduct in connection with their social relationship. *—Agencies*

Trump diagnosed with chronic venous insufficiency

Trump, 79, was diagnosed with a "benign and common" vein condition known as chronic venous insufficiency after he noticed swelling in his legs, the White House has said. Trump's physician, Sean Barbabella, said that the US President underwent a thorough health examination and it revealed no evidence of a more serious condition like deep vein thrombosis or arterial disease. Barbarella said the President remains in excellent overall health.

Germany's Merz admits that EU was free-riding US

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has accepted Trump's accusations that Europe was "free-riding" on the US, especially in regard to the Russia-Ukraine war. In an interview with the BBC, he said Europe was doing too little to fund its own defence and security, but now believes they are on the same page. "We know we have to do more on our own and we have been free-riders in the past," he said. "They're asking us to do more and we are doing more."

Trump grants relief to coal, iron ore, chemical industries

Trump is granting two years of regulatory relief to coal-fired power plants, chemical manufacturers and other polluting industries as he seeks to reverse Biden-era regulations he considers overly burdensome. Trump issued a series of proclamations late Thursday exempting a range of industries that he calls vital to national security. The proclamations allow the facilities to comply with earlier Environmental Protection Agency standards.

House approves Trump's massive cut on foreign aid

The House gave final approval to Trump's request to claw back about USD 9 billion for public broadcasting and foreign aid early Friday. The package cancels about USD 1.1 billion for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and nearly USD 8 billion for a variety of foreign aid programmes. The House passed the Bill by a vote of 216-213. It now goes to Trump for his signature. The White House argued that many of the cuts would incentivise other nations.

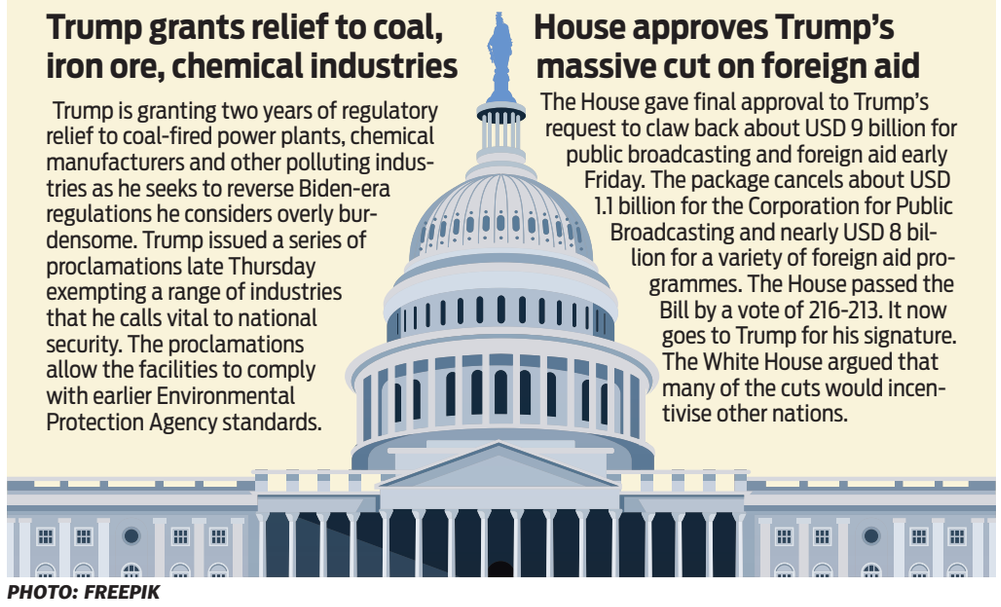


PHOTO: FREEPIK

North Korea bans foreign tourists on beach resort

SEOUL, 18 JULY

North Korea is suspending foreign tourists' entry to a recently opened mega beach resort, in a move that dims prospects for the complex that leader Kim Jong Un hailed as "one of the greatest successes this year".

DPR Korea Tour, a website run by North Korea's tourism authorities, said in a notice Wednesday that the eastern coastal Wonsan-Kalma tourist complex "is temporarily not receiving foreign tourists".

North Korea says the complex can accommodate nearly 20,000 guests. The resort opened to domestic tourists 1 July before receiving a small group of Russian tourists last week.

The announcement came after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov flew to the complex to meet Kim and Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui for talks last weekend, when Lavrov promised to take steps to support Russian travel to the zone.

But experts say North Korea likely decided to halt foreigners' travel to the zone because of an article by a Russian reporter who travelled with Lavrov that implied North Koreans at the zone appeared to be mobilized by authorities and not real tourists. *—PTI*

SHIELD FOR VIOLENCE?

ICE officers in masks spark new row in US

NEW YORK, 18 JULY

In a matter of months, it has become a regular sight around the country – immigration enforcement agents detaining people and taking them into custody. But the sight of masked agents carrying it out is creating a whole new level of conflict, in a way that has no real comparison in the US history of policing.

With the year only half over, the covered face – as deployed by law enforcement in a wave of immigration crackdowns directed by President Donald Trump – has become one of the most potent and contentious visuals of 2025.

Trump administration officials have consistently defended the practice, saying that immigration agents have faced strident and increasing harassment in public and online, and hiding their identities is for their safety.

Democrats and others, including the several state Attorneys Generals, have pushed back, saying the use of face masks generates public fear and should be halted.

In American culture, covering one's face has often gone hand in hand with assumptions of negative behaviour. The most high-profile example of mask-wearing in American history for the purpose of hiding identity is also its most negative one —the Ku Klux Klan.

Given that cultural context, it's even more problematic that those enforcing laws be the ones with their faces covered, said Tobias Winright, professor of Moral Theology at St Patrick's Pontifical University in Maynooth, Ireland. If "what you're doing is above board and right," he said, "then why conceal your identity?"

The masks made it easier for those wearing them to commit violent acts against others, added Elaine Frantz, a History Professor at Kent State University and author of 'Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction'. *—PTI*

Trump administration defendeds the practice, saying that it is for protecting immigration agents from harassment in public and online *PHOTO: X*

Pakistan owes USD 23bn in external debt

ISLAMABAD, 18 JULY

Pakistan will have to pay over USD 23 billion in external debt during the current fiscal year, which began on 1 July, according to a media report.

Pakistan's total debt was Rs 76.01 trillion at the end of March 2025, comprising domestic debt of Rs 51.52 trillion (approx USD 180 billion) and external debt of Rs 24.49 trillion (USD 87.4 billion), according to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2024-25.

The News reported that out of the total USD 23 billion in external debt servicing in 2025-26, there are temporary deposits of USD 12 billion by friendly countries, with the expectation of securing a rollover from them.

However, the country will still have to repay around USD 11 billion in external debt servicing to multilateral, bilateral creditors, international bondholders, and commercial lenders in the current fiscal year.

The situation can worsen if friendly countries refuse to grant rollovers on their deposits, which would make it compulsory for the government to make payments.

It shows that, despite claims of an economic turnaround by the current government, Pakistan is mired in local and external debts that it needs to pay annually. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Gold rises by ₹100 to ₹98,770/10g

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Gold prices rose Rs 100 to Rs 98,770 per 10g in the national capital on Friday amid a firm trend in the international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. On Thursday, gold of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 98,670 per 10g. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity increased by Rs 100 to Rs 98,300 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) on Friday. It had settled at Rs 98,200 per 10g in the previous market-session. Meanwhile, silver prices traded flat at Rs 1,10,500 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) on Friday. On the global front, spot gold went up by USD 12.38 or 0.37 per cent to USD 3,351.53 per ounce. *—PTI*

Rupee gives up gains, settles 4P lower against USD

MUMBAI, 18 JULY

The rupee gave up initial gains to settle 4 paise lower at 86.16 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, dragged by foreign fund outflows, rising global crude oil prices and a steep decline in domestic equity markets. However, a weak greenback against major currencies prevented a sharp depreciation in the local unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened higher against the US dollar at 85.99 and moved in the range of 85.97-86.23 before closing at 86.16 (provisional), down 4 paise from its previous close. The rupee declined 20 paise to settle at 86.12 against the US dollar on Thursday. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was down 0.36 per cent to 98.38. *—PTI*

Godrej buys 48-acre land parcel in Bengaluru

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Realty firm Godrej Properties Ltd has acquired a 48-acre land parcel in Bengaluru and will sell housing plots in this upcoming project. In a regulatory filing on Friday, Godrej Properties said it has acquired a 48-acre land parcel through outright purchase in Doddaballapur, North Bengaluru. "The development on this land will primarily comprise plotted units with a development potential of 1.1 million square feet," the company said. The company did not provide the how much the land cost was and the revenue potential of the project. On 16 July, Godrej Properties announced the acquisition of a 50-acre land parcel in Raipur for developing housing plots. This land will have an estimated saleable area of around 9.5 lakh square feet. *—PTI*

Wealth Company gets SEBI nod for MF launch

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

The Wealth Company Asset Management Holdings, part of the Pantomath Group, has received final approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to launch its mutual fund business. This marks the company's formal entry into India's mutual fund industry, valued at Rs 74 lakh crore, under the new name, The Wealth Company Mutual Fund. SEBI issued the Certificate of Registration on 18 July 2025, enabling the firm to operate as a registered Asset Management Company (AMC). As India's youngest AMC, The Wealth Company aims to democratise wealth creation for retail investors, with a particular focus on Tier-3 and beyond markets that are experiencing significant economic growth. Currently, around 50 mutual fund houses operate in India. *—PTI*

EU imposes curbs on Indian refinery in Russia's Rosneft

It also lowered oil price cap to punish Russia over war

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

PHOTO: FREEPIK

The European Union on Friday imposed sanctions on the Indian oil refinery of Russian energy giant Rosneft and lowered the oil price cap, as part of a new raft of measures against Russia over its war in Ukraine.

The fresh sanctions package on Russia included new banking restrictions, and curbs on fuels made from Russian crude oil.

The lowered oil price cap - currently set at USD 60 per barrel - means Russia will be forced to sell its crude at reduced rates to buyers like India. As the second-largest purchaser of Russian oil, India stands to benefit from this move. Russian crude currently accounts for nearly 40 per cent of India's total oil imports.

"For the first time, we're designating a flag registry and the biggest Rosneft refinery in India," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said in a post on X.

Rosneft owns 49.13 per cent stake in Nayara Energy Ltd, formerly Essar Oil Ltd. Nayara owns and operates a 20 million tonne a year oil refinery at Vadinar in Gujarat as also over 6,750 petrol pumps.

An investment consortium SPV, Kesani Enterprises Company holds 49.13 per cent stake in Nayara. Kesani is owned by Russia's United Capital Partners (UCP) and Hara Capial Sarl, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Mareterra Group Holding (formerly Genera Group Holding SpA).

EU sanctions means Nayara cannot export fuel such as petrol and diesel to European countries.

"We are standing firm. The EU just approved one of its strongest sanctions package against Russia to date," Kallas said. "We're cutting the Kremlin's war budget further, going after 105 more shadow fleet ships, their enablers, and limiting Russian banks' access to funding."

Among the sanctions announced were ban on Nord Stream pipelines, and a lower cap on price at which Russian can export oil.

While Kallas did not specify the new price cap, reports suggest it will initially be set between USD 45 and USD 50, with automatic revisions at least twice a year based on market conditions. *— PTI*

GLOOMY DAY

Sensex slides 501pts, Nifty ends below 25K mark

MUMBAI, 18 JULY

Benchmark Sensex tanked 501 points while Nifty closed below the 25,000 mark on Friday due to selling in banking shares after muted quarterly earnings and foreign fund outflows.

Falling for the second straight day, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 501.51 points or 0.61 per cent to settle at 81,757.73. During the day, it shed 651.11 points or 0.79 per cent to hit a low of 81,608.13.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 143.05 points or 0.57 per cent to close at a month's low of 24,968.40.

Analysts said investors turned cautious over banking stocks in response to Axis Bank's latest financial results, which fell short of market expectations.

Among Sensex firms, Axis Bank tumbled the most by 5.24 per cent after it reported a 3 per cent dip in its June quarter consolidated net profit at Rs 6,243.72 crore, impacted by the implementation of changes in non-performing assets and loan upgrade policy.

Among blue-chip bank stocks, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank and State Bank of India ended lower.

Following the decline in bank stocks, the BSE Bankex ended 1.33 per cent lower at 62,741.65. *— PTI*

Axis Bank shares down by 5%

Shares of Axis Bank on Friday ended over 5 per cent lower after the company reported a 3 per cent dip in June quarter consolidated net profit. The stock tanked 5.24 per cent to settle at Rs 1,099.10 on the BSE. During the day, it dropped 7.40 per cent to Rs 1,073.95. At the NSE, the stock dived 5.26 per cent to Rs 1,098.70. Intra-day, it fell 6.36 per cent. *—PTI*

Reliance Retail acquires Kelvinator for ₹160 cr

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Reliance Retail on Friday announced the acquisition of consumer durables brand Kelvinator from the Electrolux Group, which pegged the transaction value at SEK 180 million (nearly Rs 160 crore), as the country's largest retailer seeks to accelerate growth in the rapidly expanding premium home appliances market across India.

Reliance Retail had earlier used the Kelvinator brand under license from Electrolux Home Products Inc. The brand offers a range of products, including refrigerators, air conditioners, air coolers and washing machines in India.

"The acquisition of Kelvinator marks a pivotal moment, enabling us to significantly broaden our offering of trusted global innovations to Indian consumers. This is powerfully supported by our unmatched scale, comprehensive service capabilities, and market-leading distribution network," Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd Executive Director Isha M Ambani said in a statement.

She further said, "This is powerfully supported by our unmatched scale, comprehensive service capabilities, and market-leading distribution network."

While Reliance Retail did not disclose the value of the acquisition, Electrolux Group in its interim report for Q2 2025 said "its operating income included a positive effect from the divestment of the Kelvinator trademark portfolio in India of SEK 180 million" and it had net sales of SEK 31,276 million in the quarter. Reliance Retail said the acquisition of the Kelvinator brand is poised to significantly amplify the company's leadership in India's fast-growing consumer durables sector. *—PTI*

- Reliance Retail had earlier used the Kelvinator brand under license from Electrolux Home Products Inc. The brand offers a range of products, including refrigerators, air conditioners, air coolers and washing machines in India

IndiQube Spaces' ₹700 cr IPO to open on 23 July

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Workplace solutions company IndiQube Spaces on Friday fixed a price band of Rs 225 to Rs 237 per share for its Rs 700-crore initial public offering (IPO).

The IPO of the Bengaluru-based firm will open for public subscription on July 23 and conclude on July 25. The bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on July 22, the company announced.

At the upper end of the price band, the company's valuation is nearly Rs 5,000 crore.

The company is raising Rs 650 crore through issuance of fresh issue and promoters would offload shares worth Rs 50 crore under the offer for sale.

WestBridge Capital, a key investor in the firm since 2018, is not divesting any stake. *—PTI*

Wipro shares jump over 4%

Shares of Wipro, the fourth-largest IT services firm in India, surged over 4 per cent in morning trade on Friday after the company reported a 9.8 per cent rise in consolidated net profit for the April-June quarter. The stock climbed to Rs 271.80 on the BSE and Rs 271.90 on the NSE. Wipro announced a net profit of Rs 3,336.5 crore for the quarter, up from Rs 3,036.6 crore in the same period last year. Revenue from operations also increased slightly to Rs 22,134.6 crore compared to Rs 21,963.8 crore in Q1 FY25. Despite a sequential decline in profit and revenue of 7 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively, total bookings surged to USD 4,971 million, marking a 50.7 per cent year-on-year rise. *—PTI*

Pvt investors pumped in $333.2B to US in May

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Private investors around the world continue to show strong confidence in the United States economy, with the country receiving high foreign inflows in May 2025.

According to the monthly data released by the US Department of the Treasury, foreign private investors poured in USD 333.2 billion during the month, making US a highly attractive investment destination.

The data is part of the Treasury International Capital (TIC) report for May 2025. The total net foreign inflow, which includes acquisitions of long-term and short-term US securities and banking flows, stood at USD 311.1 billion.

This figure includes both private and official investment flows.

Out of the total, net foreign private investment inflow of USD 333.2 billion, net foreign official outflows were at USD 22.1 billion.

This shows that the major push in foreign investment came from private investors, as official institutions slightly reduced their holdings.

The Treasury International Capital (TIC) data tracks cross-border capital flows into and out of the United States. It includes Foreign holdings and purchases of US securities, US purchases of foreign securities, Banking liabilities and custody flows.

In May, foreign residents have also increased their holdings of long-term US securities. The net purchase of these securities reached USD 318.5 billion.

Out of this, private foreign investors contributed USD 287.5 billion, while foreign official institutions bought USD 31.1 billion worth of long-term US securities.

Meanwhile, US residents also increased their investments abroad. *— ANI*

AI costs over 100 Amazon employees their jobs

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

E-commerce giant Amazon has laid off more than 100 employees from its AWS cloud computing unit. The company did not reveal the exact number, but sources confirmed the development and said that the termination would be sent through email.

Reuters said an Amazon spokesperson has revealed that the decision was part of an effort to cut costs while focusing on innovation. An online media report said Amazon CEO Andy Jassy recently mentioned the growing use of generative AI could lead to workforce reduction.

It is a growing trend among tech companies to use AI agents and automated tools replace the routine jobs and reduce costs. Earlier this month, Microsoft laid off 9,000 employees as part of its third round of job cuts in 2025. Sources said the 'Specialists' team, which works directly with customers to co-create products and promote AWS services, was one of the important groups affected.

The lay-offs at Amazon also comes in the wake of a strong performance from AWS in Q1 2025, with USD 29.3 billion in revenue and USD 11.5 billion in operating income. *—Agencies*

- An Amazon spokesperson has revealed that the decision was part of an effort to cut costs while focusing on innovation. An online media report said Amazon CEO Andy Jassy recently mentioned the growing use of generative AI could lead to workforce reduction

Sebi launches Securities Market Hackathon

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Markets regulator Sebi in collaboration with BSE, CDSL, NSDL and KFintech has launched a Securities Market Hackathon at Global Fintech Fest 2025.

The hackathon intends to bring together India's brightest minds to develop digital-first solutions for tackling real-world challenges in the securities market, Sebi said in a statement. The theme for the hackathon is "Driving Innovation and tech oriented solutions in the securities market".

Participants would be required to build tools that empower retail investors and enhance transparency, efficiency, compliance, and accessibility across capital markets. They will have to develop solutions using technology and innovative approaches. *— PTI*

'NOT SAFEGUARD MEASURES'

US rejects India's claim of auto tariffs

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

India has said that it is reserving the right to impose retaliatory duties on US tariffs (25 per cent) on automobiles and auto parts **PHOTO: PTI**

The US has rejected India's claim that American tariffs on auto and auto parts qualify as safeguard measures under the WTO (World Trade Organization) rules, and asserted that the duties are imposed on national security grounds.

It has added that, on these grounds, India has no basis to propose retaliatory tariffs against these duties.

India has said it is reserving the right to impose retaliatory duties on US tariffs (25 per cent) on automobiles and auto parts, stating that the levies are safeguard measures that are harming its domestic industry.

In a reply to this, the US has informed the WTO that US President Donald Trump imposed these tariffs to adjust imports of these articles as they threaten to impair the national security of America.

"These actions are... not safeguard measures. Accordingly, there is no basis for India's proposal to suspend concessions or other obligations under... the Agreement on Safeguards with respect to these measures," a WTO communication, dated 17 July, said.

The US also said that India has not complied with the obligations under the WTO's Agreement on Safeguards.

A similar communication was also circulated to reject India's claim that American tariffs on steel and aluminium are safeguard measures under the WTO rules.

The proposed suspension of concessions, which India has notified, could take the form of increased tariffs on selected US products.

India has not disclosed those items yet. *—PTI*

IFC invests $20M in Transvolt to boost EV sect

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, announced on Friday that it is making a USD 20 million (approximately Rs 170 crore) equity investment in Transvolt Mobility Pvt Ltd to enhance electric vehicle (EV) production. This investment forms part of a larger USD 50 million financing round for the company.

This marks IFC's first equity investment in an EV platform both in India and globally. The funds will enable Transvolt to expand its electric fleet to 3,500 vehicles and create 8,200 jobs over the next five years. It will also support the company's ambitious plan to deploy 8,000 heavy commercial EVs.

Vikram Kumar, IFC's Regional Industry Director (Infrastructure & Natural Resources), stated that the partnership aims to enhance competitiveness by electrifying public and private fleets, showcasing the commercial viability of electric transportation, and improving access to quality urban transport.

Transvolt Mobility's director and co-founder, Dheeraj Jhawar, noted that the company is committed to accelerating the transition to sustainable transport in line with national and global sustainability goals. *—PTI*

Free entry for Durand Cup at Jamshedpur

JAMSHEDPUR, 18 JULY

The Durand Cup Organising Committee on Friday announced free entry for the public for all the matches to be held in Jamshedpur.All 22,500 seats are being made available through complimentary passes, ensuring an inclusive and festive start to Asia's oldest football tournament, stated a release. There will be free ticket distribution for the first match at the JRD Tata Sports Complex Stadium box office on July 23 and 24, strictly on a first-come, first-served basis, until stocks last."To ensure fair distribution, a maximum of four tickets per person will be issued," it added.Complimentary tickets have also been earmarked for local schools and all 41 teams of the JSA League.From the second match onwards, the tournament will adopt an open gate policy, and there will be no ticket requirement for entry.Spectators can walk in freely through Gates 4, 5, 6, and 7.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Lajong names Birendra Thapa as new head coach

SHILLONG, 18 JULY

Meghalaya's Shillong Lajong FC has appointed former player and long-time club associate Birendra Thapa as the club's new head coach ahead of the upcoming I-League season, officials said here on Friday. Popularly known as Coach Biru, Thapa brings with him nearly two decades of experience, having been associated with the club since 2001 in multiple roles, including player, team manager, and assistant coach. Thapa played for the club from 2001 to 2009 and was part of the historic squad that qualified for the 2009-10 I-League season.After he retired from professional football, Thapa was appointed as the Team Manager and Assistant Coach, a role he held for a decade until 2019.—*PTI*

WYTB C'ships: India U-31 team wins bronze

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

India's U-31 bridge team won the bronze medal while the U-16 side finished fourth in the 19th World Youth Team Championships held at Salsomaggiore in Italy. On the final day of the tournament on Thursday, two Indian teams were in contention for podium finishes. The U-16 team lost the semifinal playoff against France after two close sets. It, however, became the first Indian side to advance this far in the competition. The U-31 team, playing in the 'Board A Match' event, finished third among 24 competing sides to win the bronze.—*PTI*

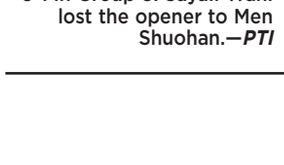


PHOTO: PTI

WUG: Srihari enters 200m freestyle semis

NEW DELHI, 18 JULY

Swimmer Srihari Nataraj bettered his 'Best Indian Time' in the 200m freestyle to advance to the semifinals, the women paddlers overcame the Netherlands to secure a round-of-16 berth, while the shuttlers lost to Hong Kong in the mixed team event on day two of the World University Games in the Rhine-Ruhr region of Germany on Friday. The Bengaluru swimmer qualified fifth overall for the semifinals scheduled later on Friday.The women's table tennis players lost the opening rubber before overcoming the Netherlands 3-1 in Group 5. Sayali Wani lost the opener to Men Shuohan.—*PTI*

Jadeja's Lord's heroics inspire India's test team

Balls to be examined by Dukes after 'soft' issues

LONDON, 18 JULY

All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja PHOTO: PTI

India head coach Gautam Gambhir led the chorus of praise for experienced all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, describing his heroics in the Lord's Test against England as an "incredible fight".

Jadeja remained unbeaten on 61 off 181 balls, but despite his valiant knock, India went down by 22 runs in the third Test. "That was an incredible fight. The fight from Jaddu was brilliant," said Gambhir in a video titled 'The MVP ft. Ravindra Jadeja, who was posted on the BCCI website on Friday.

But Jadeja, who came in at No. 7, stood firm and showed immense courage and grit alongside tailenders Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj. Together, they batted for more than 34 overs to keep India afloat.

Bumrah faced 54 balls for his 5, and Siraj played out 30 deliveries for his 4 before becoming the final wicket to fall to Shoaib Bashir.

India's batting coach Sitanshu Kotak, Jadeja's former Saurashtra teammate at the domestic level, highlighted the all-rounder's temperament under pressure.

Pacer Mohammed Siraj echoed the sentiment, underlining Jadeja's all-round value. "It's very difficult to get a player like me, and we are lucky to have such a player in our team," Siraj said.

Opener Shubman Gill, speaking at the post-match press conference, had earlier summed up Jadeja's impact.

In the eye of a storm, the manufacturer of the Duke's ball on Friday said it will conduct a thorough review following widespread criticism of the "soft" balls used in the first three Tests between India and England, according to a report in the BBC.

The on-field umpires have regularly changed the balls in the ongoing five-match series as they were unable to retain hardness and were going out of shape quickly, particularly post 30 overs. The whole process has caused delays to the match proceedings.

Following criticism by India captain **Shubman Gill** and former English pacer Stuart Broad, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) will collect as many used balls as possible and return them to the company that produces Dukes balls by the end of the week. —*PTI*

Premature ball changes have been a trend in the ongoing England-India Test series PHOTO: PTI

FREESTYLE GRAND SLAM TOUR

Praggs out, Erigaisi gets into semifinals

LAS VEGAS, 18 JULY

Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi defeated Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Abdusattorov to storm into the semifinals, but R Praggnanandhaa bowed out of the title race after losing to USA's Fabiano Caruana at the USD 750,000 Freestyle Grand Slam Tour here.

Arjun prevailed over Abdusattorov 1.5-0.5 while Praggnanandhaa lost an intense battle 3-4 against Caruana. The American duo of Levon Aronian and Hans Moke Niemann were the other winners in the quarterfinal stage, defeating compatriot Hikaru Nakamura and Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan, respectively.

While Aronian won by a 2.5-1.5 margin over four games, Niemann took longer in beating Sindarov 4-2.

In the semifinals, Arjun will take on Aronian while Niemann will meet Caruana.

In the lower bracket, world number one Magnus Carlsen regained his winning touch and ousted Vidit Gujrathi 2-0. American Wesley So won 1.5-0.5 against compatriot Samuel Sevian, while Leinier Dominguez Perez had a smooth 1.5-0.5 victory over Bibisara Assaubayeva of Kazakhstan.

Earlier in the first game too, Arjun enjoyed an advantage after the opening, but some unforced errors in the later part of the game allowed the Uzbek to get a half point.

Praggnanandhaa and Caruana were involved in as many as seven decisive games, and the Indian was in the lead on three occasions.

Praggnanandhaa won the first, lost the second, and the story continued till the sixth, until Caruana pulled away before winning the decisive seventh game.—*PTI*

Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi

Dominant India look to seal women's ODI series

LONDON, 18 JULY

Armed with multiple match-winners, India will look to continue their excellent build-up to the forthcoming World Cup when they face England in the potentially series-deciding second and penultimate women's ODI here on Saturday.

India won the opener at Southampton by four wickets, and a victory at Lord's will give the visitors an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match rubber. This would extend their string of wins in the format in recent times, including the tri-series triumph involving Sri Lanka and South Africa in May.

The games against England carry added significance as they serve as vital preparation for the ICC Women's ODI World Cup, which India will host later this year.

With several players delivering standout performances, competition for spots in the World Cup squad is heating up, but this problem of plenty is a happy headache for India coach Amol Muzumdar and skipper Harmanpreet Kaur.

The management has several options to choose from for certain roles. The depth and bench strength of the team have never been this good.

In the absence of pacers Renuka Singh Thakur and Pooja Vastrakar due to injuries, the side preferred Kranti Goud over the slightly more experienced Arundhati Reddy. —*PTI*

Rawal fined; Eng penalised for slow over-rate

India batter Pratika Rawal and the England team were on Friday fined for breaching the ICC's Code of Conduct after the conclusion of their opening ODI of the three-match series in Southampton. Rawal was handed a fine of 10 per cent of her match fee and given one demerit point for a Level 1 breach, concerning two separate incidents. Rawal was found guilty of making "avoidable physical contact" with England bowler Lauren Filer during the 18th over and with Sophie Ecclestone in the following over. The Indian opener was penalised for two separate incidents that took place within a short period.

BAJ C'SHIPS

India begin campaign with 110-69 win over SL

SOLO, 18 JULY

India notched up a 110-69 win over Sri Lanka in their Group D clash to kick off their campaign on a positive note at the Badminton Asia Junior Mixed Team championships here on Friday.

The mixed doubles combination of Vishnu Kode and Reshika U began India's march with an 11-5 win over Keneth Aruggoda and Isuri Attanayake in the relay point system, where a team had to bag 110 points to win the match.

Sisters Gayatri and Mansa Rawat then extended India's lead to 22-14 against Attanayake and Sithumi De Silva before junior world no. 1 Tanvi Sharma stamped her class against Sithuli Ranasinghe to make it 33-21 for India.

Not one Indian singles player or pair lost any 11-point relay, and by the time the match reached the halfway mark, the winners had taken a 55-31 lead.

India will now face the United Arab Emirates in their second group game on Saturday before taking on Hong Kong China on Sunday, which could decide who tops the group standings.

India achieved their best result in the mixed team event back in 2011, clinching a bronze medal. Last year, India fell short of a medal after losing 2-3 to Malaysia in the quarter-finals.

The tournament features 17 teams divided into four groups three groups have three teams each, while one group has five teams. Each team plays every other team in their group once, with the top two from each group advancing to the quarter-finals. This year's championships adopted a 110-point relay system. Each tie consists of 10 matches (two each in men's singles. —*PTI*

Tanvi Sharma

Conway, Matt Henry lead NZ to beat Zimbabwe

HARARE, 18 JULY

New Zealand took the lead in the Zimbabwe T20I tri-series points table after a second successive win, this time over the hosts. After New Zealand's bowling attack kept Zimbabwe to 120, the lowest first-innings total of the tournament so far, their batters polished off the required runs inside 14 overs, which helped their net run rate balloon to 1.919.

Zimbabwe remains without a point, and with much work to do to avoid being knocked out of their competition. They need to win both of their next two games, against South Africa and New Zealand, to progress to the final, and will need a major improvement in their batting to get there.Although Zimbabwe played more aggressively than in their opening match they hit the same number of fours (11), two fewer sixes (one in this innings, three on Monday), and scored lesser runs overall on Friday than against South Africa.

Zimbabwe's highest partnership against New Zealand was the opening stand of 37. New Zealand 122 for 2 (Conway 59*, Ravindra 30, Maposa 1-17) beat Zimbabwe 120 for 7 (Madhevere 36, Henry 3-26, Ravindra 1-10) by eight wickets. —*PTI*

McIlroy five back as Harman leads British Open

PORTRUSH, 18 JULY

Rory McIlroy continued to battle driving woes during a topsy-turvy front nine of his second round at the British Open on Friday, as 2023 champion Brian Harman moved into the lead at Royal Portrush.

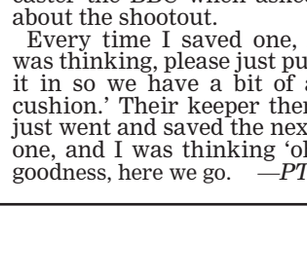
Home favorite McIlroy was level par at the turn and one-under for the tournament, five strokes behind Harman, as he continues his bid for a second Claret Jug.

World number one Scottie Scheffler, one shot off the overnight lead of four-under, is among the later starters and could face rainy conditions in the afternoon.

Harman, who won by six shots at Hoylake two years ago, started with consecutive birdies before another on the par-five seventh hole took him into the outright lead.

The American reached six-under for the tournament through his first 11 holes, one shot clear of Tyrrell Hatton, Danish youngster Rasmus Hojgaard, and Harris English. McIlroy delighted the crowds surrounding the opening hole with a birdie to immediately move to two-under after his first-round 70.

The world number two, who only found two of 14 fairways on Thursday, leaked a drive on the second well right but still saved par despite having to take a penalty drop. —*PTI*



Brian Harman and Rory McIlroy

PHOTO: X/@THEOPEN

DRAMATIC COMEBACK

England beats Sweden on penalties to reach SFs

ZURICH, 18 JULY

With 12 minutes remaining, defending champion England was heading out of the Women's European Championship.

But then the Lionesses came roaring back. Two quick goals saw them stage an improbable comeback to draw 2-2 against Sweden and then win a penalty shootout to advance to the semifinals.

"Very hyper, still very emotional, I think lots of adrenaline still in my body, I mean," England coach Sarina Wiegman said, who added that it was the most chaotic match that she had ever been part of.

"I can't remember anything like this.

England players run to England goalkeeper Hannah Hampton, celebrating after winning a penalty shootout PHOTO: X/@_HANNAHHAMPTON

"I think that's a quality that's so strong from this team, that together they're fighting back and not playing well, but sticking together, that shows so much resilience."

The shootout featured some terrible attempts, nine misses in all, before England triumphed 3-2 with 18-year-old Smilla Holmberg missing the last one after Lucy Bronze had powerfully dispatched hers for the Lionesses.

"Stressful. Stressful watching, stressful playing," England goalkeeper Hannah Hampton told British broadcaster the BBC when asked about the shootout.

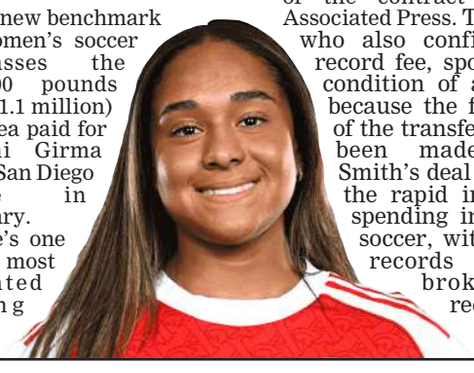
Every time I saved one, I was thinking, please just put it in so we have a bit of a cushion.' Their keeper then just went and saved the next one, and I was thinking 'oh goodness, here we go. —*PTI*

Olivia signs for Arsenal in record-breaking deal

LONDON, 18 JULY

Olivia Smith became the most expensive player in women's soccer history when she joined Arsenal from Liverpool for a world record transfer fee of 1 million pounds (USD 1.34 million).

The new benchmark in women's soccer surpasses the 900,000 pounds (USD 1.1 million) Chelsea paid for Naomi Girma from San Diego Wave in January.

"She's one of the most talented young players in the game and has huge potential for further development here at the club," Arsenal director of women's football Clare Wheatley said.

The 20-year-old Canadian forward signed a four-year deal, a person with knowledge of the contract told The Associated Press. The person, who also confirmed the record fee, spoke on the condition of anonymity because the full details of the transfer have not been made public. Smith's deal highlights the rapid increase in spending in women's soccer, with transfer records regularly broken in recent years. —*PTI*